



# **Reflections on Romans**

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## Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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# Chapter 1

## ***A Brief Introduction to Romans***

The letter to the Romans was written by the Apostle Paul while he was in Corinth shortly before his departure to Jerusalem in early 56, 57 or 58 AD. Unfortunately, it is just about impossible to tie down an exact year, but it would have been one of these. His recipients were the believers in Rome, both of Gentile and Jewish background as you will see as we go through the book.

Paul gives us some insight into what occasioned his letter in chapters 1 and 15. It seems that he was about to leave Corinth and go to Jerusalem with the offering they had collected for the needs within the church there, and he asks the Roman Christians to pray for his journey since he was very much aware that his enemies in Jerusalem were interested in killing him. He also wasn't entirely sure how the offering from gentile Corinth would be received by the Jewish Christians, as there was still a great deal of mistrust and confusion between the two groups, especially related to the role that the Law should play within the church. As you will discover, there is a great deal of discussion on this subject in the letter itself.

It is also clear, as we shall see, that Paul believed at that time that his work was about finished in the Eastern Mediterranean area, and he was already planning to venture to the western Mediterranean after his mission in Jerusalem was accomplished. In all likelihood, Paul would travel from Spain to Rome on this next journey.

Paul's purpose for writing the letter to Rome isn't as easy to discern as with most of his letters. Certainly he wanted to give clear instruction about the Gospel, and he also wanted to provide instruction about the role of the Law, and teach about the two covenants (Law of Moses and New Covenant) and how they relate to each other. It is also clear that he desired to teach unity within the church between Jew and Gentile: For these reasons, the letter to the Romans is a doctrinal essay. (Now dear reader, don't be turned off by "doctrinal" here, for that simply means "teaching.")

As we consider these things, another interesting point concerning Paul's purpose begins to emerge: Paul is sending this letter to Rome, but his audience is far greater than that, for this letter is really written to all believers in all times; it is just as relevant today as it was when it was read for the first time. Today it is beloved by millions, a comfort and an encouragement, yet our loudest doctrinal arguments swirl through its pages. Even though there may be a controversy or two, and even though there are a few passages that are rather deep, and yes, even though Paul's writing style can be a little hard to follow, I am confident that we can study this book together and come away with a clear understanding of it without raising our voices about this or that teaching by simply keeping the context straight.

In any event, it will surely be a fun adventure, so grab a chair and a cup of coffee, and we'll set out when we get together next time!

## **Greetings**

Romans 1:1-7

The custom in the first century was to begin a letter with a greeting that set forth the identity of the author, the recipient and a few words of greeting. In most of Paul's letters, those few words of greeting were comprised of a prayer and thanksgiving that expressed Paul's regard for his recipients. Paul deviated from this pattern once in awhile; in Galatians for instance, he identified himself and then launched in to quite a lecture about their error: He was writing to correct them.

Romans is another case when Paul deviates somewhat from the usual pattern. Some have suggested that he did so to better introduce himself to a church he had not yet met in person, others that he was in a hurry, but it appears to me that something else was on his mind. Thus, while I often fly past the introductory parts of his letters, I think it might be interesting to take a closer look here in Romans, because it helps us to understand the letter's context.

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—  
(1:1)*

Paul identifies himself immediately as a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ, the implication of which is that he is not writing on his own behalf, but as Christ's representative. This is amplified in the second half of the verse as he says that he has been called to be an apostle, which means "one sent" and then tells his readers he has been "set apart" for the gospel of God. Of course we know that to be set apart is another way of saying to be "holy". Thus, Paul's first line tells his recipients that he is Jesus' slave who has been sent to represent the Lord and the gospel which, if you think about it, is quite a statement: He has the authority of his Master.

In the next verse, he continues by pointing out that the gospel he represents is the very one promised in the Scriptures. The sentence continues in verse 3 as Paul points out that this gospel that was foretold by the Scriptures is all about God's Son, who was a descendant of David, the king as the Scriptures promised. This brings us to verse 4:

*and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Make no mistake about it, Paul is setting forth his authority as a teacher when he reminds his readers that he is the representative of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, whose authority and position was confirmed by His resurrection from the dead, which, if I may say so, was no mean feat.

Many years ago, I had the honor of reading a message from the president to a group of people. When you do that, there is a certain form of address, so you begin by saying, "I bring you a message from the President of the United States of America" before you start reading. I couldn't help notice that at the precise second that I said that, the silence in the room was deafening, even though everyone knew what I was doing up there beforehand. After you read the

message, you say “signed”, give the president’s name, and then say, “President of the United States of America.” To be honest with you, I thought this whole procedure was a little silly as the protocol people were briefing me on how to do this, but since it was a very nice honor, I followed instructions (for once). After I did it, I understood why it is done, for even in our cynical times, this has a profound effect on an audience.

What Paul has just done in verses 1-4 is the first century equivalent of this; he’s telling them that they had best pay attention, for this is Official God Business.

What it also tells us is that what follows will be persuasive in nature.

I mentioned in the last post that Romans is a “doctrinal essay” but what I didn’t mention is that a doctrinal essay is a persuasive piece... He continues:

*Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (1:5-6)*

Verses 2-4 set forth Jesus’ Jewish credentials; verses 5-6 set forth the credentials of Paul and the Gentile believers. This Jesus who is the fulfillment of Jewish prophetic Scriptures is the One, who called Paul to apostleship, and by His authority, Paul has called the Gentiles to faith in Christ; by this authority, no Jew may challenge the validity of a Gentile’s position in Christ or his status in God’s sight, a revolutionary concept from the Jewish perspective. Pay careful attention to verse 6: The Gentile believers in Rome are among those Gentiles who have been called to *belong* to Christ. This harmonizes nicely with Paul’s status expressed in verse 1, that of being Christ’s servant (slave is a better rendering in my view) for not only did Jesus pay the price to redeem the Jews; He also paid the price for the Gentiles.

Verse 7 makes it abundantly clear that this is being written to ALL Christians, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, for the word “all” bars no one. Paul extends his greetings and is ready to move on to the next section which is a prologue containing some personal observations.

Before I wrap up for now, I would like to point out one more thing: Paul has revealed in this passage what the letter will be about, actually who the letter is about: Jesus. As we continue to go through Romans, we must keep in mind that *the letter is about Jesus*.

Thus we have the overall context of the letter.

## **Prologue**

Romans 1:8-17

Paul's personal observations are contained in verses 8-15, and are followed by a transitional section in verses 16-17. The personal remarks fall into three sections as he tells the Romans of his prayers for them, his desire to visit them, and of his desire to preach in their midst.

Paul's prayers for the Romans can be found in verses 8-10, and follow more or less the typical Pauline pattern. Paul's prayers take on the form of thanksgiving for their faith as he mentions that their faith has been reported all over the world by the time of his writing. A secondary emphasis is his desire to visit them, which transitions into the next section which is comprised of verses 11-13.

While the first two parts of this passage are fairly self explanatory, verses 14-15 reveal a great deal about Paul's mindset:

*I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.*

In the previous section, verses 1-7, Paul made it clear that he was Jesus' slave, called to apostleship and that as such, his mission was to call the Gentiles to faith in Christ. Thus, in verse 14 he says that he is *obligated* to preach in the midst of the Romans. When you take Paul's use of the word "obligated" here in verse 14 and pair it up with his use of the term "servant" (slave) in verse 1, Paul's attitude flies in the face of our modern perspectives on faith.

What? Me someone's servant or slave? Me being obligated to do something? Outrageous! How dare you!

I can almost hear someone objecting on the basis of the old Faith versus Works argument, yet as I have pointed out so many times, there is no conflict whatever between faith and works. If you are new to this idea, here is why: Salvation is by grace through faith; we could not earn it by working for it no matter what we do because it has nothing to do with works. Having received salvation by the blood of Christ shed on the cross, mandated by God's love for us, our response is the expression of God's love in us to the world around us. Paul uses the word obligation because he has been called to make disciples, just as we have been; he is answering God's call. Yet his motivation is in the fact that he loves God and all of God's children, and there is no greater act of love than sharing God's love with others, and to share that love, he needs to do something.

In that, we find fellowship between Man and God when our relationship with God brings about the response to do our part in achieving God's purpose, which is the reason God created Man in the first place.

Paul sums this up in verses 16-17:

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

### ***The Wrath of God: Gentiles***

Romans 1:18-32

After the transition of verses 16-17, we enter the first major section of the book of Romans with verse 18. This first main section of the book extends from 1:18 – 3:20, and it contains three subsections. In our passage Paul is describing the sinfulness of the Gentiles. In the next passage, 2:1 – 3:8, Paul describes the sinfulness of the Jews, and finally in 3:9-20 he describes the utter futility of finding salvation in the Law. Bearing in mind that Romans is a persuasive piece, you can easily see the case Paul is building here, and at the same time, we can see that by breaking this argument into subsections as he has done, he avoids either Gentile or Jewish Christians asserting, as they liked to do, that one group of Christians is somehow superior to the other.

If you read this passage, as I hope you already have done, I cannot honestly imagine anyone doing so without feeling a little convicted at least once, for what Paul describes is the world we are living in. Over the centuries it has been popular in many circles to use the occasion of this text to preach hellfire and damnation, but in so doing, those good brothers of ours have taken it quite out of its context, for we have already discovered that Romans isn't about hell; it's about Jesus. I've also been careful to point out that this is a subsection in the *first* section of a persuasive piece, which means that it is being used to make one point which will be combined with other points to demonstrate something larger; it doesn't just stand on its own.

Having said that, I also want to be clear that I'm not interested in anyone's attempt to explain away anything Paul has mentioned in this passage, as so many on the opposite extreme seek to do these days. Neither of these approaches is valid, at least in my view.

I seriously doubt that you need me to explain much about this passage; it is entirely obvious what Paul is taking about. People will make their decisions to reject God and go their own ways; they will ignore what is in front of their faces to deny Him. They will concoct the most flimsy nonsense to explain Him away so they can do what they want to do; they have even invented things like political correctness to silence any opposition to their folly, and even some Christians will allow themselves to be fooled: Amazing! At some point God will simply step back and let them go, but there will be a day of reckoning.

The point Paul is leading up to is that the Law can do nothing to end this cycle of rebellion and folly.

## Chapter 2

### ***The Wrath of God: Jews (1)***

Romans 2:1-16

In the last part, I mentioned that we entered the first main section of Romans (1:18 – 3:20) and that this section is divided into 3 subsections, the first of which deals with the condition of the Gentiles. Here we begin the second subsection that deals with God's wrath and the Jews. For the sake of clarity, I've decided to split this into two parts, this being the first.

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

Romans 2:1-4

Paul originally wrote this for Jewish Christians to consider, and while that was the situation in the first century, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I think *all* Christians would be well advised to take this section to heart and do some soul searching.

This need not be a very long post, for once again, Paul's text is elegant in its simplicity, and one needs to be proud indeed to miss his point, which is that none of us is qualified to pass judgment on anyone else, for this is the sole purview of God Himself.

Is this to say that we turn a blind eye to unrighteousness?

Of course not!

If our brother or sister stumbles, the loving thing to do is to offer them a hand so they can get up again, but there is a huge difference between a helping hand and a kick in the butt while they're down! We have received God's mercy and kindness; all of us. Why must so many repay God's mercy and kindness by thinking they can push God aside and take His place as the Judge over others?

I hope that each of us will reflect on these things today, and as we each ask God for His forgiveness, may we also ask Him for His guidance as we move forward in our journey with Him.

*Programming Note:* Be looking for the first Romans "Bonus Post" later today that will provide some background on Rome and its significance in both the first century and on Paul's strategy for spreading the Good News worldwide.

## ***The Significance of Rome in Paul's Day***

Many commentators have asserted that since the end of the Second World War, New York City has been the world center of finance and culture, and while this can be argued, it is surely the media capital of much of the world; its influence is great indeed. Imagine if this cultural center used its media influence to promote the Gospel; just imagine the impact that could have...

In Paul's day, Rome was the capital of the greatest Empire the world had yet seen; it was the very center of power, economics, culture and religion, and yes, all roads led there. Since Paul was the main guy called to take the Good News to the Gentiles, it is easy to see his thinking when it came to evangelizing Rome. With this in mind, is it any wonder that he wrote his great "doctrinal essay" to the Roman church?

Even more interesting is the unique nature of the Roman church itself that appears to have started organically without an Apostle's visit or deliberate missionaries being present. Yes, I am aware of the tradition that Peter had gone to Rome to start the church there, but there isn't any historical evidence to support the assertion, and it seems unlikely at best. You might even notice Paul's remark in Romans 15:20 that he prefers "to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" which is followed by his long held wish to visit Rome as an indication that no one had previously made a "missionary" visit there. This of course leaves us with the question of how the church started...

The short answer is that nobody knows for sure.

The long answer is that we have quite a few clues giving us a number of dots we can connect, and the amazing part of this is that it will give us insight into God's workings in this world.

According to Acts 2:10, there were visitors in Jerusalem who were present when the Gospel was first proclaimed at Pentecost. Since 3,000 came to believe and were baptized, it stands to reason that some of the visitors from Rome would have been included in that number, most likely Jews and other interested Gentiles who would have taken their new faith home with them. Another possibility is that people from Rome were reached by Paul (and others) when he preached in other Gentile locations and returned home after conversion from paganism. Remember, Rome was the center of things, and people were constantly travelling to and from Rome to destinations all over the known world. An additional bit of evince to this is the fact that in Romans 16 Paul greeted by name no fewer than 25 people in Rome that he had met on his travels; mostly Gentiles. In the process, he makes reference to at least 2 home churches in Rome, and various others whose names he doesn't state specifically.

If we consider these clues, it would appear that there is a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome who have probably taken the Gospel throughout the city, a city of around a million people, including 16 synagogues that history has recorded. At this juncture, we have another question: If we know so much about the presence of Jewish synagogues, why don't we have better information about churches in the city?

On that question, we do have solid information. In about 49 AD, the Emperor Claudius issued a decree exiling all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2). According to the Roman historian Suetonius this

was done because “the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Christus (sic).” So, you ask 'how it is that Christ instigated disturbances among the Jews of the city?' If the church in Rome began when Romans on their travels observed others, such as Paul, preaching the gospel in various places, it stands to reason that they would have taken the Gospel first to the Jewish synagogues, and then to the Gentiles— with similar results: Some Jews accept the Gospel and others riot. Roman leaders don't like riots!

We know from other accounts in the New Testament that the Roman authorities seldom made distinctions between believing and unbelieving Jews, so all were sent away from the city. By 54 AD, Claudius had died and the decree was no longer enforced and the people were free to return to the city, but were hesitant to resume public assemblies. Some scholars say that such assemblies were prohibited, and maybe this is so, but I haven't been able to verify this, yet we do know that the Christians kept a lower profile than before and met in homes during this period. In any case, when those Jewish Christians returned to Rome, they found a church that was now dominated by Gentiles, since they had not been kicked out of the city.

By the time of Paul's writing, we can be certain that the church in Rome was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, a fact that Romans confirms. Some parts are specifically written to Jews, others to Gentiles, but the message is clear: They are to act as One. Clearly, this caused Paul to write a universal message that is relevant to all Christians of whatever background or ethnicity in any period of time.

### ***A Roman Lesson***

You might have noticed a couple of things that give us insight into God's workings in our world. Two of these, I thought would make an interesting little discussion.

The first of these is the fact that Paul employed a strategy in the way he spread the Gospel to the Gentiles; he was intentional in his efforts. He first travelled to the areas of the Eastern Mediterranean closest to Judea, and then when he had finished with that region; he turned his eyes farther west to Spain and Italy. He knew that the ultimate key for the spread of the Gospel was Rome itself, since it was the center point, the most powerful and influential city and the very heart of the known world at the time, so when the time came for him to write down his most fundamental teachings, he sent it to the church in Rome, from whence it would go everywhere else. Maybe we should be more intentional as well. He sent the essay to Rome, but he still ran into difficulties in getting there, but in the end he succeeded in travelling to Rome at the expense of the Roman Government itself and found himself in a position to share the Gospel with members of Caesar's household before he was called home; my, how our Lord gets things done when a person is willing to serve Him!

The other thing I wanted to reflect upon was the way the church in Rome actually appears to have been started. Visitors from Rome who were attending Pentecost when Peter taught on that first day became Christians and took their faith home with them. People visiting other places

where Paul was teaching came to faith and took their new beliefs home with them, and in both cases, they told their friends and others in the community around them about Jesus.

The church in Rome began when new Christians told others about their faith; *they put faith into action*.

If you are reading this, then most likely you are a Christian who is also a blogger. Like Peter and Paul, we have an opportunity to reach people from all over the world here on the net, and if we tell the story of Jesus Christ in a compelling way, who knows how our efforts might be used by God for His purpose. In fact, we might even be the catalyst for a whole chain of events that make a major difference for the Body of Christ, and never even know about.

How can we make a difference for Christ through our blogs?

This is a question that all of us should be asking, clearly Peter and Paul asked such questions in their times.

Of course, we can also share face to face with those around us, as the Romans obviously did with no help from the “professionals” because God seems to do His very best work through regular people like you and me: I pray we all reflect on these things.

### ***The Wrath of God: Jews (2)***

Romans 2:17-29

In these verses, Paul adds a new dimension to the ongoing tension between Gentile and Jew within the church and that new dimension is that being a “Jew” in the New Testament is something quite different that it was in the past. Before Christ, being a Jew was all about being a descendant of Abraham *in the flesh*, thus being circumcised if you are male, and being the possessors of the Law of Moses. Now however, all of that is different...

In 2:17-24, Paul lays out a scenario; quite a common one in fact, of a first century Jewish person who believes that he is superior to others because he is a Jew (17-20). Because they were in possession of the Law, Jews believed they were more enlightened than other peoples, who were living in the darkness of ignorance, hence Paul’s comments about teaching the foolish and so on. While being possessed of this attitude, all Jews knew that they were not always entirely perfect in their keeping of the law, whether they chose to admit it or not, thus Paul transitions to a series of possible examples of their own imperfection in 21-23. In verse 24, he references the writings of Isaiah and Ezekiel to conclude his point, reminding them that among the Gentiles, their very apparent hypocrisy has brought dishonor to the name of God: Outward righteousness is never an acceptable substitute for inner truth.

Verses 25-27 reinforce this thought by using circumcision as the very sign of “Jewish-ness” for it is indeed the covenant sign of being Abraham’s descendant. Simply bearing the outward sign does not matter if the entire Law is not kept. A person who keeps the Law but is not circumcised will be the one who condemns the circumcised lawbreaker.

With this set up, Paul drops the bombshell:

*A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God. (2:28-29)*

It isn't easy for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to fully appreciate how revolutionary this was in the first century to the Jewish psyche. The entire Law is an exercise in outward forms representing an inward reality *that was to come*; the outward forms themselves did not save anyone. We should understand this, even though most modern Christians seem to miss it. We covered this in our study of Galatians, see Galatians 6:12-16, and note what Paul says is the "Israel of God" in verse 16. For Jewish Christians of Paul's day, an understanding of this principle would have put an end to the practice of some who caused no end of problems by insisting that only Jews could receive Christ.

The Law could not save a person; it could only condemn a person. Ceremonies and rituals cannot save a person, only Jesus can save us. Observing traditions of whatever sort cannot save anyone, only the blood of Christ can do that, and being transformed into His likeness can only be hindered by such things, for only personal relationship between the Master and His disciple can transform a person.

## Chapter 3

### ***Paul debates... himself***

Romans 3:1-8

I really enjoy these passages in which Paul uses a style called “modified diatribe” or as I would say, a rant. In these verses, Paul gets into an argument with himself. To be sure, he is not confused about these issues, he instead is trying to anticipate common objections to the revolutionary statements he has made at the end of chapter 2, and in all likelihood these reflect arguments that he has had with prominent Jews in the past.

The first of these questions and answers is found in verses 1 and 2 where Paul asks the question: *What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? (v. 1)* and then provides the answer: *Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God. (v. 2)*

Since Abraham’s day, the Jews have had a special relationship with God, and it was to them that God provided His Word, and to them that He trusted that His Word would be protected and obeyed, which of course takes us back to the problem of their unfaithfulness. They had the relationship and the Word and the Law... and they didn’t keep it.

The next Q & A is in verses 3-4:

*Q: What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? (v. 3)*

*A: Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:*

*“So that you may be proved right when you speak  
and prevail when you judge. (v. 4)*

The question relates to the proposition that if God would punish His people for their disobedience, then God would be acting in a way that was unfaithful to His covenant promises in the Law, namely that He would be their God and they would be His people. Paul flatly rejects this premise in verse 4 (“Not at all!”) but that exposes a fundamental error in the understanding of many people, both then and now, who miss the fact that God made two kinds of promises in the Old Covenant, for as you read through the Law, you will find that it is full of “blessings and curses”. There are promises of blessing for those who keep the Law, and curses, *which are also promises*, for those who break the Law. To put it another way, if a person kept the Law, they would be entitled to claim the promise of a blessing, but if they broke it, God promised to curse them, thus for God to provide the blessing and forget the curse would mean that He wasn’t faithful to the whole Law.

This is the point that Paul makes in verses 5-8:

*But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!*

Paul mentions in verse 5 that this is a human argument. As we read it, we might even think it is a frivolous argument, which it is. These are just the kinds of arguments that often trip us up; silly ones, based on human thinking that cannot begin to see things from any perspective other than a personal one; they are the kinds of arguments that children make!

In verses 9-20 Paul concludes this section, and we will have a look at it next time...

### ***Equality Between Jew and Gentile***

*What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.*

Romans 3:9

We have arrived at Paul's conclusion of what he has been discussing in this, the first main section of Romans. Without any doubt, his conclusion is one of those "good news – bad news" kind of things. The good news is that neither Jew nor Gentile has anything over the other: They have amazing equality. The bad news is that they both have serious problems with God.

Verse 9 leads us right into the fray: The Jewish Christians have no advantage over the Gentile Christians, because the very thing that makes them Jewish is the Law, and the Law condemns them for their disobedience to it.

In verses 10-18, Paul cites Old Testament passages to bear this out; I'll let you read them on your own...

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

Romans 3:19-20

Does anybody really want to go back to the Law?

This is precisely why God promised deliverance through Jesus Christ, for the Law could never make a person righteous in His sight, and it is also precisely why God has no intention of ever going back to the Law in the future. The Law has served its purpose by making the people aware of their sin and their need of salvation. If you look at the world around you, you might

notice that apart from God, people have a nasty habit of not noticing that their ways aren't exactly all that wonderful. Of course we know that the Law also had a second purpose, that of binding God's people together into a Kingdom, a Nation, and in the Old Testament, it did so in form by providing an illustration of what would come in Christ.

And then Jesus came and fulfilled the Law entirely, bringing about, by His sacrifice on the cross, a wholly new kind of Nation, a Nation that is not of this world, but rather a Kingdom of Heaven, a Kingdom that is within us even now.

When we next get together, Paul begins a new section in Romans, one that explains the redemptive work of our Lord; see you then.

### ***There is another way***

Romans 3:21-31

In the first main section of Romans, Paul demonstrates that Mankind is in a perilous situation, for none can be saved through the working of law— unless of course one is perfect.

But we are not perfect.

Paul's purpose in writing the second main section of Romans is to let us know that there is another way, apart from the workings of law; the way of grace. This concept however, is as complex as it is simple, an apparent dichotomy that gives trouble to many in understanding it. Comprehending that none of us is perfect really isn't difficult; we see it in others, we see it in ourselves, human imperfection is ubiquitous. Comprehending that God's standards are way too high for mere mortals isn't that complicated either, after all He's God. Yet if God's standards are so high and we are so imperfect, how can God maintain His standards while letting us off the hook? Ah yes dear reader, that is the tricky part, isn't it? Paul answers that question in 3:21 – 5:21, the second major section of the letter.

*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify (3:21).* God has introduced a new system, a system that is apart from the Law; entirely new. Yet in doing so, God has maintained the high standard of the Law without compromising His integrity that the Law has demonstrated. It is a system that has been promised in the past, and now it has finally been revealed. In verses 22-24 Paul explains that this new system is based upon our placing our faith in Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins. *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith (25a).* Here is where Paul tells us *how* God has done this amazing thing. Then Paul reveals the tricky part:

*to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

## Romans 3:25b-26

When an Old Testament Jew died, he died in his sins, for the sacrifices of the Law did not take sins away, they postponed punishment for a year at a time. Under that system, God agreed to hold off dealing with the sin question, but He didn't agree to forget about it entirely; a permanent solution would come later which is how Jesus became the fulfillment of the Law. Now Jesus has come and completed His work, and if we would like to receive God's grace we may, but in order to receive it, we must place our faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for both Jew and Gentile, from Paul's day until now.

Suppose I wrote out a check to you for \$100,000. as a gift. Before I sent it to you, I shoot you an email asking you if you would be interested in accepting my nice gift, for I wouldn't want to clutter up your mailbox if you didn't want it; all I'm asking is that you send a quick reply and let me know that you will accept it, and the gift is yours. I'd almost be willing to bet that most of you would hurt my feelings by not placing enough faith in me to accept this gift that I've worked so hard to be able to offer you! Why I would imagine that if I just mailed the check to you, most would be afraid to cash it, some might even call the police.

I'm hurt, dear reader, I'm hurt...

In any event, this is the case that Paul is setting out to demonstrate in this section as he moves on to verses 27-31, where he points out that the result of this grace is that there is no longer any distinction in God's sight between Jew or Gentile, and that the redemption we have received in Christ has nothing to do with any righteousness we might have apart from God's grace: This is the fulfillment of both the Law and the prophets.

Yet, this is not to say that there is nothing we do to receive grace, however. Does that surprise you? To be quite honest, there are three things we must do to receive grace, but you can relax, for none of them involve our earning of grace in any way— but we must accept it. To accept grace we must decide to believe God when He offers it. Second, if we decide to believe God's offer, we must then decide to place our faith in Jesus Christ, and then we must decide that our first two decisions are irrevocable.

Look, you already lost out on \$100,000. of free money because you didn't make those decisions, how much more important is forgiveness of your sins and eternal life? Come on people; let's make up our minds here!

Hopefully Paul can make this point with more eloquence than I have. We'll see as we continue our study...

## Chapter 4

### ***Faith Like Abraham's***

*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

Romans 4:1-3

Having stated his thesis in the last section, Paul moves on now to prove it; what better place to begin than the story of Abraham? After all, all Jewish history begins with Father Abraham. Abraham found favor in God's sight, but that favor wasn't the result of his works, it was found because of his faith. He was no more perfect than you or me, in fact he made some bizarre mistakes, and still he was righteous in God's sight because of one thing and one thing only: He believed God. God offered Abraham a promise, and Abraham decided that he would believe God, and God decided that Abraham was righteous when the only thing he had done *was to make a decision to believe God.*

*Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness*

Romans 4:4-5

Paul illustrates this idea with an example. A man who works has earned his wage as an obligation on the employer's part. The employer pays the worker nothing until the payment has been earned through work, and when the obligation is paid, the employer has no obligation whatsoever to pay anything else. A gift is different, for it is given freely— if it isn't given freely, then it isn't a gift. In the same way, grace is not earned by working because if it was it wouldn't be grace; it would be a payment for services.

*David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*

*“Blessed are those  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.  
Blessed is the one  
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.*

Romans 4:6-8

David had a sense of what was to come when he wrote this, for there is no specific provision in the Law for what he referred to here. David like Abraham believed God and was a man after God's own heart even though he was far from perfect. Believing God, he perceived a time that

was coming when God would provide for outright forgiveness for those who would place their faith in Him and so he decided to do his best, as had Abraham long before, to live as though God's promise was already fulfilled: We call that faith.

Oh yes, and God, through Jesus Christ, took care of the rest!

### ***The End of Circumcision***

*Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

Romans 4:9-12

To make his point about the validity of Gentile redemption without first being circumcised as Jews, Paul uses an argument called a "self-evident truth." No matter what a man's position on circumcision might be, he will not argue with this point, for it is self-evident.

What's that, you have a question here...? Why is it self-evident? Seriously?

It is because, as any man will tell you, in order for a grown man to be circumcised, one of two factors must be present: A, Superior force, or B, great faith. (We're funny like that.) That Abraham submitted voluntarily is a demonstration of faith, it is not the means by which he received faith.

Therefore, since salvation is by grace *through faith*, and faith is required for circumcision, circumcision, by necessity, must be irrelevant to the obtaining of faith in the first place.

This logic led to a first century theological crisis that plagued the early church, for as we know there was a great deal of conflict over this point when well meaning Jewish Christians asserted that Gentiles must become Jews before they could be Christian. Please understand that these Jewish brothers weren't just trying to be difficult, they were actually trying to help, for they had been taught that no one could inherit the blessings promised to Abraham's seed without actually *being* Abraham's seed. Their understanding was entirely physical, and the descendants of Abraham were his descendants in the flesh; they carried Abraham's DNA.

By the way, that is why circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, for it marked the very physical organ that would deliver Abraham's seed, ensuring that any offspring produced would be sons and daughters of Abraham.

The entire Old Testament system was physical in nature, and what people then and now have a hard time comprehending is that this system was only an illustration of the reality which would come through Christ. Jesus provided the fulfillment of the descendants promise made to Abraham, for it was through Jesus that all nations would be blessed and through whom those descendants would be more numerous than the stars of the heavens.

The only thing was that Jesus was not born of a human father, and that is where we transitioned from the physical illustration, to the heavenly reality; that is how the Gentiles could be saved into God's family without Abraham's DNA. That is also why circumcision is not necessary for a Christian male, for physical DNA is irrelevant. Instead, the thing that counts is not our human birth or lineage, but rather being born again of the Spirit.

*It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*

Romans 4:13-15

Abraham did not receive God's blessing because he followed the Law, when Abraham was alive, **there was no Law**, for that came centuries later. Abraham was blessed by God because he believed God, and so it is for us to this day.

### **Unbreakable Grace**

*Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*

Romans 4:16-17

Paul continues from where we left off last time, now drawing his conclusions: God's promises are guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants through faith; carrying his DNA has nothing to do with God's promises because it's all about our faith.

Paul continues:

*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for*

*us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

Romans 4:18-24

When I read this, there are so many thoughts running through my mind: What amazing faith Abraham had!

Without just repeating all of the things I've already said in this passage, and without restating what Paul has so clearly written here, I'm just going to leave you with one thought; that's right, just one.

It's a big one though; maybe you should sit down before you go any further...

OK, are you ready? Here goes...

*No human being is excluded from God's grace, unless he chooses to exclude himself.*

Can you think of anybody who needs to hear that today?

## Chapter 5

### *Our Hope*

Romans 5:1-11

We have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Let's see a show of hands: How many of you were really excited when you read that first sentence?

Interesting...

Can we read these verses and say, "yep, that's nice"? Can we be so used to hearing that we have been reconciled to God that we take it for granted?

Some time ago I was teaching a group of Christians and was discussing a similar verse, and I said something like, "doesn't the understanding of this glorious truth change the way you view everything?"

I was chastised for suggesting such a thing because life is sooo very hard.

I was almost speechless, and I erroneously thought at first that they must have misunderstood the question or that I hadn't spoken clearly enough, but as it turned out, they understood the question perfectly, they just didn't think it was that big of a deal. It was a whole different sort of "wow moment" for me. At that time, I was beginning a class on Hebrews, and we were in chapter 1; it was early in the game, and I had my work cut out for me, so I let it go. Several sessions later I taught a class that began with Hebrews 5:11...

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.*

If our text from Romans doesn't get your attention, then I confess I don't know what to say.

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:6-8

You should have jumped up and cheered when you read that, for it is indeed a life-changer in every sense. This reality should affect the way we view everything in our lives. You see dear reader, we reveal where we are spiritually by the way we respond to things. There are millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are considered to be very thoughtful and mature in the faith, who are often in positions of leadership, who expose their own lack of maturity in the faith by the things they say and do. It is not our place to judge them or to criticize them of course, but

we should be aware lest they lead us astray. You see, an immature follower of Christ sees their circumstances— a mature follower of Christ sees Jesus.

So, as I was saying, how does our text strike you; are you cheering?

I guess we all still have some work to do.

### ***The All-Sufficiency of the Sacrifice of Christ***

Romans 5:12-21

The NIV (and other translations as well) has added a subtitle at the beginning of this section which says “Death Through Adam; Life Through Christ”. To the editors of the NIV I have two things to say to that subtitle: First, “Amen.” Second, “Why would you place a subtitle immediately before a section that begins with the word ‘therefore’?”

As I have pointed out so many times, the word “therefore” is used to draw a conclusion from the preceding passage, and that means what came just before “therefore” and what comes right after “therefore” go together; they are not separate. In defense of the NIV editors, many theologians over the centuries have read 5:1-11 and 12-21 as two different sections as well in total disregard of the rules of interpretation, rules they would apply anywhere else. Go figure?

I point this out because if we get that point, 12-21 gets much easier to follow. You see, these verses are about the supremacy of the sacrifice of Christ, not about the mechanics of sin; sin is defeated, as is death and the Devil. Here’s another way of saying the same thing: Adam screwed up; he was the first man to screw up. Later on, I screwed up too. Yikes, I have trouble with God because I screwed up. God sent His Son to sacrifice so I could get right with God. I accepted His grace through faith, and now I’m OK with God again. I am happy about that.

See? That wasn’t so bad...

Verses 1-11 tell of our assurance of salvation because of God’s amazing love and the grace that He offered to us. Verses 12-21 give us the assurance that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is more than enough to pay the price for our sins because that all-sufficient sacrifice has utterly defeated sin, death, condemnation and Satan.

I don’t see any particular reason to read something else into this passage, do you?

### ***A Pause to Regroup***

We have now completed the second main section of the book of Romans, and I thought this would be an opportune moment to pause and regroup. The purpose for writing this section was to demonstrate that while humanity, both Jew and Gentile, is in a bad place, being under condemnation from God, there is a way to overcome that bad position: Grace.

To make his case, Paul made three points in his argument: First, that grace provides justification for our sins (Romans 3:21-31). Then he demonstrates that Abraham was found righteous because of his faith (Romans 4). Finally, Paul shows us that our justification by grace through faith is assured (Romans 5).

His first point, in 3:21-31, that grace provides justification for our sins, is backed up by 5 points and thus, his argument looks like this:

Proposition: Grace provides justification for sins. (3:21 – 5:21)

1. Grace as justification for sin is by faith in Jesus Christ (3:21-31)

- A. Grace has now been fully revealed to us through Jesus Christ. (3:21-23)
- B. Sinners are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ (3:24-26)
- C. Sinners are justified apart from works of the Law (3:27-28)
- D. Grace is available to all people (3:29-30)
- E. Law is upheld by the proper working of grace (3:31)

If you look carefully at these points, you will easily see that Paul has made a compelling argument that grace provides us justification for our sins by faith in Jesus Christ. Notice how he really zeroes in on his target here; there are no sidebars or detours in his argumentation. Now, let's have a look at his second point:

Proposition: Grace provides justification for sins. (3:21 – 5:21)

2. Abraham was found righteous because of his faith (Romans 4)

- A. Abraham was justified by faith apart from works of the law (4:1-5)
- B. David explained and confirmed justification by faith apart from works of the law (4:6-8)
- C. Membership in Abraham's family is by faith and not by circumcision which is a work of law (4:9-12)
- D. The blessings promised to Abraham come by faith and not by works of the law (4:13-17a)
- E. Faith means believing God's promises (4:17n-22)
- F. Those who believe like Abraham are justified like Abraham (4:23-25)

Once again, looking at Paul's argument, we can see that he is relentless in proving his point that Abraham was found righteous in God's sight (justification) in spite of his sins, because of his faith. We can also see that in the process of making this argument, Paul has blown up the notion that circumcision is in any way an operative factor in receiving God's grace. Now, let's see his last point:

Proposition: Grace provides justification for sins. (3:21 – 5:21)

3. Justification by grace through faith is assured (Romans 5)

A. Assurance of personal salvation (5:1-11)

- 1) Justification by faith is critical to assurance (5:1-2)
- 2) Trial and tribulation do not nullify assurance (5:3-5)
- 3) Christ died for us while we were still sinners (5:6-8)
- 4) Our hope is even more secure now that we are His friends (5:9-11)

B. The death of Christ is all-sufficient (5:12-21)

- 1) The sin of one man, Adam, brought sin into our world (5:12-14)
- 2) Christ and His sacrifice are greater than Adam and his sin (5:15-17)
- 3) Christ's sacrifice reverses completely the results of Adam's sin (5:18-19)
- 4) Grace triumphs over sin and death (5:20-21)

With point 4) above, the proposition is proven.

Once again, we can clearly see that Paul is writing this to make a particular point, which is another way of saying that he is writing *in context*. As a further observation, he is using a persuasive structure that is called *primacy – recency* that recognizes that in any communicative setting, a listener or reader is most likely to remember what they heard first and what they heard last, and that of these two, they are most likely to remember what they heard last. Thus, when you are making a case with three main points, your most important point is the last one you mention, the second most important point is first mentioned, and the least important point is in the middle. Clearly this is in play here, because of all three of his supporting points, the most important is that our justification is assured. In using such a structure as this, the strength of one's case would be reduced significantly by inserting a sidebar or detour in the middle of the most important point, which is one more reason that I do not believe for a minute that Paul intended to do so in chapter 5.

In any case, if you are new to all of this “interpretation stuff” I hope this little exercise has been helpful; if nothing else you can see how I have reached the conclusions I have written about in these posts.

## Chapter 6

### ***On to the next section...***

We have now completed the first two main sections of Romans, and so far we have discovered that no one can be saved by the law, for the law condemns us all (1:18-3:20). In the second section, we discovered that grace takes our sin away, thus bringing about our justification before God (3:21 – 5:21). Both of the first two sections relate to our outward problem of sin, but there is much more to grace than the simple removal of sin; it has an inward aspect as well.

Once our sin has been removed and we are justified before God through grace, there is much work to be done for forgiveness of sin is not the end of the story but rather it is the beginning. In fact, it is entirely possible for a reasonable man or woman to read our discussions about grace and in all seriousness to ask if it matters what we do from this point forward, after all our sins are forgiven anyway. Why should we obey the teachings of Jesus? Does it make any difference how we live? Can't I just do my own thing? If my sins are forgiven, who cares?

Paul answers to these questions are found in the third section of Romans, which covers chapters 6-8, and as we will see, grace is a double cure.

To put this another way, in the last section, Paul demonstrated that grace provided justification for sins, in this section Paul will demonstrate that grace provides total victory over sin. Once again, there are three main points in the argument: First in 6:1 - 7:13 he will show that grace does not render sin irrelevant. The second point in 7:14 - 8:13, shows us that grace gives us victory in our struggle against sin, and finally in 8:14-39 we will see that grace's total and complete victory over sin is assured.

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Romans 6:1-4

With these words, Paul launches his argument that sin is not irrelevant because of grace. No, we don't keep on sinning so that we might receive even more grace, how can we do such a thing?

What exactly and precisely, does it mean for us to be "born again"?

The answer is in these verses: We are baptized into Jesus' death; this is where the "old me" died with Him. When Jesus was placed into the tomb, He was most assuredly dead, but then a curious thing happened: He rose from the dead. When I was baptized, they put me under the water and then a curious thing happened to me also: I came up out of the water a new man: I was born again. I was a new creation because I went under without the Holy Spirit, and I rose up with the Holy Spirit within me; "sin" remained behind. (see also Acts 2:38) You see, when I

was baptized, not only was my sin stricken from my “permanent record” I became a new person. As a new person, why would I want to run back to the old way? That would be stupid!

Paul expands on this thought in verses 5-14, so we aren’t finished with this quite yet, but I think I’ll end for now and let you have a little time to ponder this. We’ll pick up with verse 5 next time...

## ***Dead to Sin***

Romans 6:1-14

Last time, we covered the first four verses of this section (6:1-4) where the idea of being dead to the old way of living was introduced; now in the rest of the passage Paul develops this idea further beginning with verse 5:

Paul continues with the idea of having died with Christ as he moves from the picture of baptism to that of having been crucified with Christ. In this imagery, he reasons that since our old selves were crucified with Christ, our old selves died, and thus we are set free from the sin that ruled over us, so that now, united with Christ in His resurrection, we are free to live for God.

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

Romans 6:8-10

These verses reflect the key point that Paul is making here: just as Christ died when His mortal human body was put to death, so also was our old self put to death when we decided to believe Him. Just as Christ rose from the grave, so also we rose again from baptism to be born again with an entirely new kind of life within us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He continues...

*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

Romans 6:11-14

Let’s consider the following phrases from 11-14:

*... count yourselves dead to sin ... do not let sin reign... Do not offer any part of yourself to sin ... offer yourselves to God... offer every part of yourself to him...*

Does anyone see a pattern here?

These little bits of text have something in common: They are commands that leave us with a choice to make. The choice is whether or not we will follow the command.

Jesus has entirely set us free from the oppression of sin; let it go so you can live a new life: This is Paul's teaching on the subject of sin.

Before you say I'm crazy, consider one other point: Did you notice the way Paul is referring to "sin"? He isn't speaking of it in the sense of rules and violations here; no, he is almost personifying it as a person or force of some kind. In that sense, it has no power over you any more, unless you allow it. ("Do not *offer* any part of yourself to sin"..."*offer* yourself to God")

How can this be? How can I just be done with sin?

(Hint: you have a whole new life within you)

You see dear reader, in Christ, you are not under law, but under grace; offer yourself to God—He's waiting for you.

Paul will explain more about that in the next section and we will discuss it next time.

### ***We are not free to sin***

Romans 6:15-23

No! We are not free to sin; we are free *from* sin... and the difference between these two is huge.

In these verses, Paul is explaining what he spoke of in our previous passage when he presented us with a command and a choice. This time, he uses slavery as his illustration.

First, in verse 16 he explains what he meant in his use of the word "offer".

*Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

Of course, in verse 17 he points out that as followers of Christ, we have given ourselves to Him; not to sin, and therefore we are now "slaves" to righteousness (v. 18).

What good ever came from offering ourselves as slaves to sin? No good at all, we earned death. Now, Jesus has set us free from all of that, and we are called upon to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness (to continue Paul's metaphor) and righteousness brings eternal life. So now, let's pause for a moment; remember those phrases from last time; here they are again:

*... count yourselves dead to sin ... do not let sin reign... Do not offer any part of yourself to sin ... offer yourselves to God... offer every part of yourself to him...*

Now, remember what they have in common: They are commands that leave us with a choice; follow the command or don't follow it. What will we decide?

OK, dear reader, let's sit down and figure it out together: Which way is better: The way of sin that leads to death, or the way of righteousness that leads to eternal life? Here, to help get the conversation started, I'll throw in my two cents:

Death sucks; I'd much rather have eternal life.

Yes, OK fine; I'll admit that maybe I'm simplifying things just a bit, but really, it's a no-brainer.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (6:23)*

Paul's point is so very simple; in fact it is so simple that I'm not sure that many of us really take it seriously enough. Grace has set us free from the sin that once dominated our lives so that we are now free to choose whether to follow the old ways that lead to death or the new way that leads to life. Life is better than death, so choose the new way and receive life. Not really taking this very seriously, this is where we say, "But it's too hard!"

Before we go any further, what is the point Paul is making in this third main section— anybody remember?

It is that the power of grace gives us complete victory over sin. His first point in proving this is that sin is still relevant. We are in the middle of his second supporting point which is that grace brings us victory over sin. I would say that so far he is doing a good job of making the case that grace gives victory over sin, wouldn't you? We have not yet finished the second supporting point and there is still a third supporting point, so let's try not to jump into the "it's too hard" stuff just yet; that discussion is yet to come.

When we get back together, let's dive into 7:1-6 where Paul will show us how we can obey God...

## Chapter 7

### ***Released from the Law***

Romans 7:1-6

*Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.*

Romans 7:1-3

Paul concludes this point with an interesting illustration; marriage. When a marriage partner dies, their covenant is dissolved and the remaining partner is free to marry again; I don't know about you, but I find this an interesting point. If I remember correctly, Jesus blew the minds of the Pharisees one day when they brought this up. It seems they couldn't deal with the thought that in heaven a woman might have more than one husband, if her husband died and she remarried, so they asked Jesus about it. To be fair, on this particular occasion, they weren't trying to trap Jesus; their real targets were the Sadducees. Anyway, Jesus told them that in heaven, we will be like the angels who do not take partners in marriage. When I read those verses, I always smile at the rivalry between the Pharisees (who did believe in resurrection) and the Sadducees (who did not)... and at the same time, I have a chuckle at the expense of some of our romantic notions about heaven.

Back to Paul's point, it would seem that Paul didn't share any romantic notions about husbands and wives in heaven either. When the husband dies, the widow is free to marry another because she... and her husband for that matter... are released from the bonds of matrimony. In the same way, just as Jesus' body died on the cross, so did we, and we are thus set free from the Law.

*So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*

Romans 7:4-6

Having been released from the Law, we reap significant advantages such as freedom from sin, freedom from fear and freedom from death; yes indeed, this is a really big deal. Before this, we were caught up in a system that didn't lead us to a good place, for under the Law, we could only

be condemned. It would seem that there is something deep in human nature that the Law could not repair: "...when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death."

What is it in us that drives us to sin in the face of divine law?

Have you ever told a 2-year-old *not* to do something? If so, what do they do?

Yep, the very thing you told them not to do!

I think that answer to the question comes down to what the nature of sin really is. It isn't merely the violation of a rule; it's a spirit of rebellion. When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, his problem wasn't just that he did a "no-no" it was that he wanted to be like God; he rebelled. Law defines what it is to rebel, it makes rebellion clear to us and what do we do?

We rebel.

Things are different now, for through Christ we died to the Law and are released from its written code; obedience to God is not longer a matter of mastering our own will, for now we have a whole new life within us, *so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit*. The presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit changed everything; there is only one thing we have left to do, and that is to make a choice: Follow the old way or follow the new way.

The sad truth is that most of us never actually make a choice, and suffer repercussions as a result. What is the repercussion? Without making a choice, our "settings" remain "default settings" and therefore we follow the old ways. When a person is still following the old ways, they tell everybody around them of their status; can you guess what they say? Yes, that's it! They say...

"But it's too hard..."

### ***The Fall, Falling and Figuring Things Out***

Romans 7:7-13

My normal practice here is to simplify the complex. If I am criticized for being too simplistic or basic in my explanation, I figure I've done my job. For this post, I'm going to do the opposite (just for fun) and complicate that which is simple. Don't worry, I'll cover the simple part first, and then delve into the work of complicating it. First, the simple part:

Paul uses a "straw man" argument in this passage. A "straw man" argument is an argument that poses an absurdity and then blows it away to make a larger point. Here is the straw man: "Is the law sinful?"

What a ridiculous question; of course it isn't sinful, if it is, then God is a sinner!

Paul makes this clear in the verses that follow; I hope you've read them. In those verses Paul points out that the Law was a good thing, for it showed us what God expects of us, and gives us regulations so that we can avoid grieving Him. The only problem is that in doing this it strikes a chord in humans that leads us astray. The good news however, is that by revealing how much we need a savior, it also leads us to accept grace when it became available. We can see this at work when we talk to people about Christ, and they tell us they don't really need saving because they are "a good person." The Law shows that while we may be good, on our own we aren't quite good enough... but there's another way.

OK, that's the simple part: End of lesson. Here's me making it complicated:

I would imagine that many read these verses and begin thinking about The Fall and the results of "The Fall" and its consequence that we are "fallen" and can't help ourselves from sinning against God. I do not like the expressions "The Fall" and "fallen". I almost never use them, and when I do I normally say that I don't like the term, but I need a label to shorten things up, for if I say "The Fall" people know what I'm talking about without having to re-tell the whole story. You might be wondering what I have against these frequently used terms, so I'll tell you:

They don't work!

Oh, in a way I wish that they did, it would be so much easier for me to take refuge in the notion that I have nothing to do with my own sin, but that simply is not true, for I have everything to do with my own sin. Yes, Adam was the first man to have sinned, but I don't need his failings, I have plenty of my own. Here, let me ask you a question: If we sin because Adam sinned, then why did Adam sin— because he was "fallen"? Did Adam sin *after* "The Fall"? Of course not; that's crazy! If his sin was "The Fall", then it happened *before* "The Fall", even if only seconds before. "The Fall", and "fallen" as the reason for (cause) of sin are circular arguments, and they do not reflect accurately Paul's teaching in Romans. You might recall from last week that when we read these kinds of passages in context, they reveal quite a different story. Martin Luther was a great man of faith, but he was mistaken when he wrote that "even now millions of babies are burning in hell to the glory of God".

Therefore, when I sin, I cannot blame the Law, I cannot blame Adam, I can't blame the Devil and I cannot blame God.

Believe it or not, I think this is really great news!

It is really good news because ***grace gives victory over sin!***

Oh, by the way, that is Paul's proposition, the very point he has set out to prove in this section— go figure.

***Paul Begins His Next Point***

## Romans 7:14-25

We are still in the third main section of Romans where Paul is proving that grace gives victory over sin. In his first supporting point, he has shown that any notion that grace makes sin unimportant is simply false. Now in the next supporting point, he returns to the proposition, that grace brings victory over sin. Here he will support his case with 2 sub points, first that we do indeed struggle with sin (7:14-25) and then that victory comes through the Holy Spirit (8:1-13).

In this post, we have the first sub point, that we do indeed struggle with sin. If you have read the verses (please do read them) they paint a very dire picture, and if they stood all alone, I might be inclined to take back my comments about “The Fall” and our being “fallen” from yesterday, but praise be to God, for this is the set up for Paul’s point, not the point itself!

Humanity is weak and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; who can argue against that statement? Jesus Himself noted it on that fateful night in Gethsemane when He observed that the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. We live in a world that is full of the consequences of sin. Our human world often glorifies and romanticizes sin; it models sinfulness for us every day and so it is no wonder that we struggle with sin; for us to avoid sin altogether is asking a great deal indeed. It could be likened to being on a diet and sticking to it in a bakery when nobody is looking: Oh the temptation!

But nobody held a gun to your head and forced to buy that sticky bun; you were just weak.

This is what Paul means when he speaks of our sinful nature. Here, why don’t I just come out and say it? Paul is not teaching the *Doctrine of Total Depravity* in these (or any other) verses; that doctrine doesn’t work. *Total Depravity* teaches that because of “The Fall” we are born sinners and totally depraved all of the time; we are not capable of making decisions to follow God or to do anything other than to be depraved sinners. If that were so, then why is Paul writing this persuasive piece that keeps throwing a choice at us; if we are totally depraved then we cannot be persuaded, and we cannot make the right choice, for we would of necessity be utterly incompetent to do so. Sometimes dear reader, it is helpful for us to actually consider the meaning of the words people throw at us, before we just accept a *non sequitur* as being true.

We human beings are not totally depraved, but we are fallible, we do make mistakes and errors of judgment; each of us has struggles as we try to live in a harsh world... but do not let anyone convince you that God made you depraved. God did not make you depraved, dear reader— He made you His precious child.

We must not stop reading at the end of chapter 7. If we stop now, we will walk away with entirely the wrong idea, for in 8:1-13 Paul will show us that not only does grace pay the price for our sins, but that it will make it possible for us to overcome this whole sin struggle business once and for all, and we will see how he does it next time...

## Chapter 8

### ***The Solution to the Problem***

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Romans 8:1-4

Remember that the proposition Paul is setting out to prove in this section is that grace gives us victory over sin. In 8:1-13 Paul's supporting point is that grace gives us complete victory over sin by the Holy Spirit. This is broken into 2 sub points: 8:1-4 shows that grace has taken care of the penalty for sins, and 8:5-13 shows that we can overcome our sinful natures by the working of the Spirit within us.

In chapter 7 Paul went to great pains to demonstrate that we cannot overcome sin on our own and he brought that point to its climax in 7:24-25:

*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

These verses are the reason for the connective "therefore" in 8:1 and it is as if Paul were saying, "Oh no, I can't do it on my own, but wait; Christ has done it for me!" Clearly, verses 3-4 establish that Jesus has fulfilled the righteous requirements of Law relating to our sins.

If we were to stop reading after verse 4, then we will shortly return to chapter 7 and despair. We already know that Jesus has paid the price for our sins, and so we want to live the right way from now on, but we are still weak in our mortal bodies, surrounded by sin and temptation; it is only a matter of time until we stumble again. I really believe that this is the reason that many Christians struggle with guilt, self loathing and sheer frustration, with the result that they question the very foundation of their faith.

But Paul kept on writing.

*Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

Romans 8:5-8

In these verses, Paul once again gives us the challenge of a choice: Will we live according to the old way, or will live according to the new way? As he often does in his writings, Paul uses flesh and spirit as his means of describing the old and new ways of life. Yet here he adds another element to the challenge by describing the two ways of life in terms of our focus; “mind set on...” If our mind is set on the flesh (old ways of life that center on the sensations, needs and desires of the physical body) then we cannot please God.

*You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. (8:9)* If we are a follower of Christ, then the Holy Spirit lives within us; He is our Comforter, our Helper, promised to us by Jesus Himself. This is where our minds are supposed to be focused, not on our circumstances. *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (8:11)* If we are followers of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit within us will give life to our mortal bodies so that we are no longer living in death (separation from God). It would be helpful if we recognize that Paul isn't talking about after we die in this sentence; he's talking about right now.

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Romans 8:12-13

We have an obligation to live according to the Spirit, to set our minds on the Spirit within us; Jesus has already done the work, now we need to make a choice. Oh, and by the way, we are expected to make the *right* choice to live according to the Spirit. When we do, when we set our mind on the Spirit, the Spirit will guide us, sustain us, strengthen us and enable us to not only walk away from the legal penalty for sin, but to put sin to death in our lives.

Therefore, grace gives us victory over sin *in every sense*.

Now if all things are possible with God, and if God is in us through the Holy Spirit, and if we set our minds on the things of the Spirit, then we really can overcome sin in our lives, not by our own human strength, but by His life in us.

Remind me please: What was it again that is too hard?

### **God's Children**

*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and*

*co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

#### Romans 8:14-17

With these verses, Paul begins the final argument to demonstrate his proposition that grace brings victory over sin. Paul's final point is that the victory of grace over sin is completely assured. This argument is broken into four sub points, the first of which is comprised of verses 14-17. The first sentence is the transition from the previous passage into the new subject which is that grace has assured that we are God's children.

Of course "the Spirit you received" refers to the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit through whom we have been adopted to sonship. Because we have become God's children by having been born again of the Spirit, we can truly call God "Father". Our assurance of this is that the Spirit who indwells us testifies with our spirits that we are His. Because we are now His children, we are also His heirs, co-heirs with Christ; that is borne out by our willingness to suffer with Christ in this life.

The second of the four sub points is found in Romans 8:18-25, and is truly amazing: As co-heirs with Jesus Christ, we will inherit the universe. I realize that most preachers don't preach sermons on this and most Sunday school lessons aren't about it either, maybe that's because they fear that we will let our imaginations get carried away. For just a moment, however, try to imagine what that would look like; the whole universe, restored to its pristine condition. Our present circumstances are nothing when you consider what we will have in Christ; why obsess about circumstances? The entire creation is yearning for the day when God's children are revealed! (8:18-19). Sin has had a terrible consequence on the creation, this wonderful world that God created has been in decay ever since, but it will not always be this way, for it will be redeemed as we have been. (8:20-21).

The creation groans in anticipation of that great day just as we do, we who have the firstfruits of sonship, who eagerly await the fullness of sonship when even our mortal bodies will be redeemed (8:22-23). The final two verses are a little different, an odd way of putting it, yet they make a great point. We are eagerly awaiting the final part of the promise we have received from God, and the very fact that we are still hoping demonstrates that it has not yet been accomplished. For in this life we still must deal with pain, suffering, sickness and death. So, we will continue to wait eagerly and patiently until Christ completes the last bit of His work upon His return.

#### ***When I am Weak, He is Strong***

We now continue in this section where Paul is making the point that grace gives victory over sin, and that victory is assured. As always, it seems to be one thing to say so, and another thing in daily life; how does this victory come about in the face of life's challenges? We saw in the last post that this victory comes through the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, which we

received at “birth” when we were born again. This new life makes us God’s children, His family, and it is our membership in His Family that assures our victory.

Paul continues proving this point as we turn to his next sub point, in verses 26-30 where we find that God will bring His children through their earthly trials.

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (8:26-27)*

When times are tough, we might not know what to do, we might be at our wit’s end, but the Holy Spirit that indwells us intercedes, even though we may not understand it at the time. There is a really interesting little element in play here, something that we like to talk about, but sometimes overlook in times of trial; the indwelling Holy Spirit is really quite active in our lives when we are weak. On the other hand, when we are strong, or when we think we are strong, the Spirit seems to be less active; you may have experienced this yourself. Yet the interesting component of this is that the Spirit is always there, always busy and always working, but we are often distracted going our own way, doing our own thing. In these times, I often find that I have blundered yet again into a “learning moment” wishing I had learned that lesson *last time* so I wouldn’t need to learn it yet again this time...

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Romans 8:28-30

In these verses, Paul continues making the point that God has promised to see us through our trials in life. Verse 28 is one of comfort for millions, for it assures those who love Him that no matter what our circumstances, God will see us through and work things out to a good end; good for His purpose.

“Wait! Hold on, what was that again?”

Yeah, there’s a condition: “...*those who love him...*” Who are the ones who love Him? Jesus told His disciples that if they love Him they should keep His commands (John 14:15), Thus I would suggest that those who love Him are those who keep His commands, the very first of which was “follow me” or to put it another way, those who love God are those who have responded in obedience to the Gospel— Christians.

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (8:29)*

This is a tricky verse, and by that I mean a controversial one. Let's be careful that we don't read things into it that aren't there. "For those God foreknew..." follows from verse 28, which is directed at those who have responded to the Gospel in obedience, so they are the ones He "foreknew". This is because God knew well in advance that when the day came that the Gospel was proclaimed to all nations, many would respond to it in obedience, and thus they were foreknown. God ordained or "predestined" that they would be "conformed" to the image of His Son, so that His Son, who was first to be raised in glory from the tomb would be followed by His brothers and sisters. If you have been following our tour through Romans, you will recall that Paul has been teaching this quite a bit already.

*And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (8:30)*

Those who responded in obedience to the Gospel (predestined) were called. This isn't difficult when you ask yourself what is really going on when the Gospel is proclaimed, for when it is proclaimed, we are being called to follow Jesus. Those who respond in obedience have been justified, which happens to be theme of the book we are studying, and they in due course will be glorified just as Jesus was when He rose from the grave. What this passage is there to teach Paul's readers is that our victory over sin by God's grace is assured because God has ordained that it will be so, which happily is the context in which the passage falls.

I realize that some may prefer to add some extra significance to what these are saying, and that's fine by me; I won't make a big deal out of it since I don't debate any more. Actually, if you are a *Total Depravity* fan, you will need that extra bit of significance to make *Total Depravity* work, but if I may offer a suggestion before you go ahead... You may well be able to fix the doctrinal problem that *Total Depravity* brings about, but aren't you going to have an even bigger problem with *Selection and Predestination*? If it was me, and I was still a debater, I would just leave these verses in context because it is easier to defend *Total Depravity* than it is to defend *Selection and Predestination*... I'm just sayin'

### **God's Love Assures Us of His Grace**

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

Romans 8:31-35

With these words, Paul begins one of the most beloved, beautiful and memorable passages in all of Scripture, and the final and most compelling of his arguments to support the proposition that grace provides us with complete victory over sin. By grace we are justified *before* God, for

we are justified *by* God. God so loved us that He was willing to give His own Son as the sacrifice for sin— He will not change His mind. We are co-heirs with Christ to all things; that is a certainty. No human or earthly circumstance can come between us; God has made it so: Who would dare to challenge His decision?

*As it is written:*

*“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

Romans 8:36; Psalm 44:22

These verses seek to show that suffering and trial have long been the lot of God’s people on this earth, and trials will continue in this life for many Christians, but even suffering, natural death or persecution amount to but little when compared to the glory that is to come, for just as Jesus has overcome the world, so shall His people.

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:37-39

As followers and co-heirs, we will not only survive the trails of this life, we will conquer them; we will overcome the world, its attractions, deceptions and hardships by His grace that we have attained through our faith in Jesus Christ. Dear reader, do not ever let anyone tell you otherwise, for the assurance of this promise is beyond question.

And with these words, Paul rests his case, for he has proven that grace has completely and totally defeated sin in all of its forms.

### ***Section Recap***

With the previous post, we have completed the third main section of Romans comprised of Romans 6-8. The proposition that Paul set about to prove is: Grace gives us total victory over sin. As we saw in our tour of this section Paul once again sought to prove his proposition with three arguments:

1. Grace does not make sin irrelevant (6:1-7:13)
2. Grace gives us total victory over sin (7:14-8:13)
3. The victory of grace over sin is assured (8:14-39)

As I did with the last section, I thought I would recap his arguments so that you can review his reasoning and see his logic...

Proposition: Grace gives us total victory over sin

1. Grace does not make sin irrelevant (6:1-7:13)

A. Sin still matters (6:1-14)

B. Freedom from the Law is not freedom to sin (6:15-7:6)

1) We are slaves to God (6:15-23)

2) We obey God from our hearts (7:1-6)

Paul's two supporting points here are interesting, both were set up with questions that one might be prompted to ask and followed with emphatic negative responses. Sin still matters and we must not mistake our freedom as license to go crazy, for this is not only displeasing to God, but it denies us the total victory that grace can provide. It is far too easy for a person to stop looking at behavior once they see their slate is wiped clean legally, but God wants an intimate relationship with His people, and that cannot happen when we are chasing every fancy around with our backs turned to Him. The second supporting point takes this underlying thinking to the next level:

Proposition: Grace gives us total victory over sin

2. Grace gives us total victory over sin (7:14-8:13)

A. We continue to struggle against sin (7:14-25)

1) The nature of the struggle lies within our humanity (7:14-20)

2) Our struggle is more than transactional (7:21-25)

B. Victory over sin is provided by the Holy Spirit (8:1-13)

1) God has saved us from the penalty of sin (8:1-4)

2) Sin and death are defeated within us by the power of the Holy Spirit (8:5-13)

Freedom *from* sin is not freedom *to* sin; this is at the core of Paul's reasoning in this section. We are not perfect, and contrary to the notions of some, humanity never was perfection, for we have within us free will as a gift from God. Yes we struggle, yes we will fall short sometimes, but the penalty for our sins has been taken away by the blood of Christ; so great was God's love for us. Even better, God did not take away our sins and then leave us all alone, for He has also given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us. This guidance is not simply a matter of helping to keep the rules handy, for the Holy Spirit also gives us the strength to grow beyond our impulses so that over the course of time and growing maturity, sin become less and less appealing, and as a result, grace not only gives us victory over sin's consequences, but victory over sin's appeal,

which is a great transformation indeed. With this fresh in mind, Paul moved to his final supporting point:

Proposition: Grace gives us total victory over sin

3. The victory of grace over sin is assured (8:14-8:39)

A. The Holy Spirit within us makes us God's sons and heirs (8:14-17)

B. The entire creation is our inheritance (8:18-25)

C. God has promised to bring his family through earthly trials (8:26-30)

D. God's gracious love gives us clear assurance of our victory over sin (8:31-39)

In this wonderful section, Paul paints us a picture of God's commitment to our success, which is proven so clearly by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. When we allow the Holy Spirit to be the center of our lives, when we stop trying to be in charge of everything, when we surrender to His love and guidance, His victory over sin in us begins to emerge no matter our circumstances. This is a life-long process, a work in progress and it requires great faith, but victory is assured. All that is left for us to do is to make a commitment to let Him lead the way.

Well, what do think? Did Paul prove his case; does God's grace give us victory over sin in all of its forms? I think he did a great job... but that's just me.

# Chapter 9

## ***Part Four and the Problem Posed by Israel***

Romans 9-11

As we begin the fourth main section of Romans, we enter an entirely new conversation; there is not connection or transition between 8:31-39 and this unit and the abruptness of Paul's change of subject is stark to say the least. Most scholars consider this section to be one of the most difficult in the New Testament and as you might imagine, the views and teachings about this section are widely varied. It seems to me that the larger part of this difficulty is caused by the fact that Paul never makes his purpose in writing clear, or at least it isn't as clear as He usually makes it in his writings. It is almost as though it was a given, so obvious that it didn't need to be stated. At the time of his writing, that may have been the case, but all of these centuries later, it's not easy to nail down.

Clearly though, he is writing about the problem of Israel.

The problem of Israel is this: Israel was God's Nation; a Nation made up of God's chosen people, the only people on earth who as a Nation had a special relationship with God. They had been entrusted with His Word, and it was to Israel that God had promised the Messiah who would come to redeem them and through whom all of the nations of the earth would be blessed. Yet, when Messiah came, Israel by and large rejected Him, for He was not the kind of Messiah they wanted. What they wanted was a Messiah who would drive out the occupying Romans and restore Israel to greatness as a Nation of this world, for they wanted their earthly enemies crushed. God however, had a different plan, and He sent His Son to redeem all Mankind and establish an entirely different kind of Kingdom; one that is not of this world. This raises a very hard question: Does the rejection of most Jews mean that Jesus failed in His mission?

This is a question that we still debate today, for many Christians believe that Jesus *did* fail to establish His Kingdom, that the church as His Kingdom is what their rejection forced God to accept, and that when Jesus returns He will establish His Kingdom by force on the earth right after the remaining Jews accept Him, and that there will be a whole new age on the earth before the final judgment. Other Christians believe that the church as His Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom not of this world was the plan from the beginning, that Jesus was successful, and that when He returns He will return for the Judgment; oh yes, this is a tough section.

Romans 9-11 has 5 sections; Paul makes 5 arguments in these chapters. The simple outline looks like this:

1. The problem posed by Israel (9:1-5)
2. The distinction between ethnic and spiritual Israel (9:6-29)
3. Israel has chosen law over grace (9:30-10:21)
4. God's salvation of the true Israel (11:1-32)

## 5. God's way is the right way (11:33-36)

In order for us to study these three chapters in a sensible and meaningful way, and in order to be fair to the various views that are out there, I would like to propose a working theory regarding Paul's purpose in writing this section. My working theory is in the form of this proposition:

*God is faithful in his dealings with Israel.*

As we study this section, I will assume that this working theory is correct, and by the time we have finished, we should clearly see whether or not our working theory is correct. If it is, great. If it isn't, we will no doubt have identified what is correct, and we'll replace our working theory with a new theory and test it in the hope that we will come to a conclusion about Paul's message, a conclusion that is reliable, understandable and in harmony with Paul's other writings and the New Testament generally.

### **Paul's Anguish**

*I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*

Romans 9:1-5

This is the first point in this fourth main section of Romans; and a curious point it is! Paul has made his grief and anguish clear; what he has not made clear is why he feels this way. We might even suspect that what Paul does not say here is as important as what he actually does say. There is a hint, for us in these verses, for Paul tells us that he could wish that he was cut off from Christ and cursed for the sake of Israel (v. 3). Could it be that Israel was cut off from Christ and cursed somehow?

Of all people, Paul would understand this whole situation, for he had been a Pharisee among Pharisees, a real up and comer you might say. His zeal for the Law and the traditions of his people was so great that he was a leader among those who persecuted the early church, not only in Judea, but in other areas as well. Yet one day on the Damascus road he had an encounter with Jesus Christ. While this part of Paul's biography is remarkable, more remarkable still is the fact that of all people, Paul was the one called to take the Gospel *to the Gentiles*.

Pharisees were not known to care much for Gentiles; this we must understand.

Paul had been raised, educated and trained in Jewish Law, custom, culture and tradition; he loved everything Jewish. If any man understood the chasm that separated Jew from Gentile, it was Paul. If any man recognized what divided Jew from Christians, it was Paul. So what does God do with Paul? He sends Paul out as the Apostle to the Gentiles; amazing, simply amazing.

I think that I am safe in saying that this move defies all human reasoning, but then God defies human reasoning quite a lot.

Having met Jesus on that road face-to-face, Paul has learned the truth of the Gospel message first hand, he recognizes like no other how the Scriptures have foretold of the coming of Jesus, and was perhaps the very first to fully comprehend the great error that his beloved people have made in rejecting Jesus, not to mention the consequences of their rejection, and when he thinks about it, he is filled with anguish and grief for their situation. Yet, he will answer his call to the Gentiles...

I have stated multiple times already that Romans is a persuasive essay on Christian teaching. In any persuasive argument that comprises a call to action, it is necessary for the author or speaker to establish that there is a problem, that there is a solution to the problem, and that the solution being offered is better than the current state. In the matter of Jewish versus Christian, Paul has just established that there is a problem for a person who is Jewish to come to grips with; they have turned away from God by their rejection of His Son. As this section moves forward, Paul will get into various facets of this problem, and it will become clear that accepting Jesus Christ is every bit as crucial for the Jew as it is for the Gentile, and in so doing I believe that he will also show that God is and always has been faithful in all of His dealings with Israel.

### **God's Faithfulness**

Paul expressed his anguish over the situation with Israel in the previous section between their curses in 9:1-3 and their blessings in 9:4-5, and now he moves to explain the paradox; in a sense, there are two Israels, one according to ethnicity and one according to faith. It seems that God has chosen a certain family of people to be His Nation through which He brought forth His Son, yet not all within that family (ethnic Israel) have chosen to follow His Son, and thus will likely be lost. Paul begins to address this issue in 9:6 ff.:

*It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (9:6)* This distinction is set forth in verse 6 as you can see; Paul continues:

*Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."*

Romans 9:7-9

We sometimes forget that not all of Abraham's descendants are or ever were part of "Israel" for before Isaac was born, Abraham fathered another son, Ishmael who was not a son of the promise, even though he was a son of Abraham. Only those who descended through Isaac were considered his descendants, and not even all of them were considered his descendants:

*Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

Romans 9:10-13

Isaac and Rebekah conceived twins, but God's promise did not extend to both of them and their descendants. Esau, the twin who was born first, thus the heir of Isaac, did not receive the promise and was excluded from those who were considered to be Abraham's descendants even though he was the firstborn of Isaac. Excluded, his descendants became a separate nation, the Edomites who were enemies of Israel. Let's not forget that the descendants of Ishmael also became a people, enemies of the Israelites and who even today are the enemies of modern day Israel, and far more numerous.

It is clear in this discussion that Ishmael was not the son of promise because he was the issue of human connivance and not the promise of God who clearly stated that Sarah would bear the son of promise, but the issue of Esau is worthy of consideration: Why did God select Jacob and not Esau? The obvious answer is that God is God and can choose whomever He wishes to serve His purpose, and Paul will make that point. A little less obvious is that God foreknew that Esau would not take His promise all that seriously, so he chose Jacob to carry the promise forward; it seems that God already knew that Esau would trade his birthright for a bowl of stew, and this leads us to the heart of the matter.

There is considerable debate these days about God's foreknowledge and its relation to cause and effect. Did God *make* Esau trade away his birthright to Jacob for unknown reasons of His own, or did God *know* Esau would do this *on his own* because God is all knowing and not subject to time and space? I am content to let others worry about that one; I think there is a much more important issue in play. When we think of divine covenants, we tend to think in terms of salvation. We see covenant language in 9:4-5 and think of the Jews in terms of salvation with the result that the paradox of Israel is unsettling for us, as it was for Paul, but we must stop and think before we react.

Salvation is only found in one covenant, the New Covenant established by and through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. God's covenant with Abraham did not contain a promise of salvation for Abraham's descendants. Instead the Abrahamic covenant had two kinds of promises, the land promise and the descendants promise. God promised that Abraham would have descendants more numerous than the sands of the beach, and that through them all nations would be blessed. With the arrival of Jesus Christ on the scene this was fulfilled, for His blood was shed for all nations, Jew and Gentile to be saved. It also promised that Abraham's descendants would be given the land of Canaan. Jesus has come and Canaan was delivered long ago and that covenant was fulfilled long ago. God also made a covenant with Moses, the Law. It held that God would be their God and they would be His people if they would follow its laws, but it made no mention of salvation or eternal life. We know that the Law was incapable of making anyone righteous in God's sight, and Paul has himself made this case in Romans. So then, how could anyone be saved, how could any man be made righteous?

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, thus a person could become righteous in God's sight by believing Him. (Not believing in Him, but believing Him) This is another way of saying that they could attain righteousness in God's sight by putting their faith and trust in Him, even though they were imperfect and could not keep all 613 laws all of the time. This righteousness was judged at God's sole discretion. If we go through Old Testament history, how often do we find an account of such a person? Abraham and David come to mind quickly and there are certainly many others, as well as "regular folk" who aren't mentioned, yet as often as not, we see Israel turning its back on God, as did the Israelites in the Wilderness; they might have believed in God, but they did not believe God. Paul is trying to impress upon his readers that the paradox of Israel is nothing new, and it does not mean that God has failed or that He is unfaithful to His promises in any way, for the problem is to be found in the unbelieving hearts of the people themselves.

Paul has much more to say on this, as we will see next time!

### ***God's Right to Choose***

*What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses,*

*"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

*It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

Romans 9:14-18

I know a lot of people who would cringe at these verses; I know others who will be jumping in to attempt to make a clarification before they have finished reading: "What Paul really meant to say was..."

I hope that you will do neither!

Let's pause to recall where this passage falls in the text. Paul is discussing God's faithfulness in His dealings with the Jews. His first task was to point out the problem posed by Israel; the paradox (9:1-5). We are in his second point about God's faithfulness. The first supporting point that we discussed last time, was that God has been faithful in dealing with the Jews from the very beginning, and now in this second supporting point, Paul is simply pointing out that God has the right to choose who will serve His purpose, and as such this should be obvious to anyone, but Paul covers it so that nobody can question it. The narrative on this whole matter will continue into a third point after this passage; it does not stand all alone, so relax... God is not unjust.

BUT, we must also keep in mind that mercy and justice are not the same thing.

The example used here is that of Pharaoh who was used by God to glorify Himself and accomplish His purpose, and He did so without the consent of Pharaoh who was used unwittingly. Even though Pharaoh was not a God-follower, even though Pharaoh was in opposition to God and His people, God used him. In this sense, Pharaoh was God's chosen instrument, God's "elect". Was Pharaoh saved by God?

No: He was used by God.

God foreknew that Pharaoh would not respond to Him in obedience, that he would not bow down to God in worship or reverence, and so God chose to use Pharaoh to display His awesome power to the world, so God hardened Pharaoh's heart further than it already was, thus being "elect" is not always the same thing as being redeemed.

Paul will fully develop this idea when we continue next time in 9:19-29.

### ***God's Purpose for Israel***

*One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?*

Romans 9:19-21

It is important that we not forget the passage just before this, the one we covered last time; God can choose who will serve His purpose. This falls within a larger context of the paradox of Israel that Paul made clear in 9:1-5. Although Israel has had so many blessings from God, they for the most part, have rejected Him by refusing to follow His Son. While keeping these things in mind, also recall that even though most Jews rejected Jesus, there was a number who have followed Him, and who have been persecuted for doing so.

This section is Paul's third supporting point in his larger discussion concerning the distinction between ethnic Israel and spiritual Israel. Here Paul's mention of God's faithfulness with Israel is in answer to the question he posed in verse 19: *"Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?"*

In verses 20-21, Paul indicates that even asking such a question isn't entirely proper, for not only does God have every right to choose who will serve His purpose and how they will serve it; it is not for humans to question how God goes about His business. In the verses that follow, Paul develops a fascinating idea:

*What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?*

Romans 9:22-24

Paul uses an interesting persuasive technique here, for he carries on as though he were debating someone. He posed their question in verse 19, and answered a part of it in 20-21, telling them they have no business questioning God, and then shoots back his counter in verses 22-24 in the form of questions. Since a person wondering or questioning along the lines of verse 19 would have to be Jewish, the counter-questions would cut deeply, for they would also know enough about the history of Israel to know that Paul was unmistakably describing Israel as the ones who deserved God's wrath and who were shown God's mercy. They would also easily recognize that Paul was referring to those Jews and Gentiles who had received God's mercy through Christ, and that God had a purpose in setting things up the way He did. He drives his point home with four quotes, two each from Hosea and Isaiah:

*As he says in Hosea:*

*"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;  
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"*

*and,*

*"In the very place where it was said to them,  
'You are not my people,'  
there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"*

Romans 9:25-26

The Hosea quotes support Paul's assertion relating to the Gentiles; the Isaiah quotes relate to the Jews:

*Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:*

*"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,  
only the remnant will be saved.  
For the Lord will carry out  
his sentence on earth with speed and finality."*

*It is just as Isaiah said previously:*

*"Unless the Lord Almighty  
had left us descendants,  
we would have become like Sodom,  
we would have been like Gomorrah."*

Romans 9:27-29

The Isaiah quotes tell the story, only a remnant of Israel will be saved by faith in Christ, and sadly the vast majority would reject Him. Yet God's purpose was served and the Law had done

its work as intended, for without it, Israel would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah, and for all of its faults, Israel was never like that.

God established ethnic Israel for His purpose of paving the way for His Son to redeem all Mankind and to prepare a core group of people who would respond to the Gospel of Christ with faith. The Law made plain their need of a Savior, the experience of the Nation made clear their need of a Savior, and the Prophets foretold of a Savior who was to come, and many responded when He came. Yet the majority of the people saw the Law as merely an outward work, and they gloried in their outward righteousness, but in the end, they chose the work of the Law over the Truth of God's redemption, for they placed a higher priority on their own accomplishments than they did on the promises of God.

So we are left with one final question: Did God foreordain that most of the people would be lost; did He *cause them* to be lost; was it God's sovereign will that caused them to reject their Savior?

If you aren't clear on that question, then you will want to keep reading, for it is the subject of the next main section of Romans. By the way, remember our working theory about this section? It was *God is faithful in His dealings with Israel*.

I would suggest that this is precisely the point that Paul has addressed in 9:6-29.

### ***Israel Has Chosen Law Rather Than Grace***

We have arrived at Paul's next supporting point in this main section that deals with God's faithfulness with Israel. Last time, we were left with the question of whether or not God was the cause of Israel's unbelief, in this supporting point that extends from 9:30-10:21, Paul answers that question; *Israel has made a choice*.

This section has three supporting arguments, the first of which is our subject now, and is found in 9:30-10:3. The supporting argument is that there is a difference between personal righteousness and the righteousness of God.

*What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written:*

*“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall,  
and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.”*

Romans 9:30-33

You would think that this should end any debate, but among Christians today, the debate rages on. The Law cannot lead a person to righteousness, and it is the very purpose of the Law that

we reach this conclusion. Laws, rules and violations, as well as traditions and ceremonies are often near and dear to us, for they form something we can all get our arms around; they are in a sense, tangible things. It is easy to comprehend a rule book, and it is comforting to see someone else break a rule and point fingers at them and take attention away from ourselves. Faith, on the other hand, is intangible and often uncomfortable, for it requires that we really believe that what we believe is really real, even if we don't always feel like it; it is counter-intuitive.

Being righteous because of merely following the rules is quite different than obtaining righteousness by believing God as Abraham did. The Gentiles who were saved, as well as the Jews who were saved, were saved because they believed the Gospel even though they had not kept all of the Law, all of the time. Those whose faith was in their ability to keep the Law and follow the customs and traditions of their people could never accomplish their goal of righteousness in God's sight.

*Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

Romans 10:1-3

Does it strike anyone as odd that Israel, because of their zeal for God and His Law failed to obtain His righteousness? If we are inclined to legal thinking, we might assume that this happened because they broke a rule or two, but I suspect there is another reason. Yes, God gave them the Law, but the Law was never His purpose, it was a step in achieving His purpose, but it was never the purpose itself. When God created Adam, did He give Adam the Law?

No, He did not.

God created humanity for relationship and purpose, not for keeping a bunch of rules, traditions and ceremonies. God wanted His people to love Him and to trust Him, which means believing Him; Israel chose its own way, the way of earning righteousness by following the Law by their own strength, rather than by believing God and seeking relationship with Him, for they did not realize the difference between personal righteousness and the righteousness of God. I daresay that quite a few Christians are confounded by the same thing today.

## Chapter 10

### ***Jesus Christ is the Source of Righteousness***

*Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

Romans 10:4

This verse follows from the prior section; many, if not most scholars will place it in that section as a conclusion, and they wouldn't be wrong to do so. However it also marks a topical change, for what follows in 10:5-13 are verses that support the assertion of this verse, so I see it as a beginning and not a concluding point. The larger view of the passage indicates that Paul is building his supporting points into a larger conclusion, which is very persuasive argumentation.

In support of Paul's statement in verse 4, he offers verses 5-13:

*Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Essentially, this paragraph presents a contrast between law/works righteousness and believe/faith righteousness to support the assertion that righteousness is by believe/faith. To put it another way, Paul is making the case that we come to righteousness by trusting in Jesus and not by trusting ourselves. Verse 5 illustrates the utter futility of finding righteousness through law, for living by law can only bring about condemnation. Verses 6-7 make an allusion to Deuteronomy 30:12-13 where Moses was telling the people that the Law was not something they couldn't grasp or that was so far off they couldn't understand it; all they needed to do was obey it. Paul makes a similar point about grace, only Paul isn't talking so much about the *knowledge* of grace as he is about the *possession* of it. It is as though he was telling his readers, "look gang, this isn't difficult, you have this grace right there with you, just grab onto it!"

It is this point that the remaining verses elaborate upon; grace is right there, take hold of it; that's all you need to be saved. You may recall that we have discussed the fact that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, and that Paul has made the point that the righteousness that brings salvation to humanity is the righteousness that comes from believing God; this he is again pounding home.

This is troubling for many people, both then and now because it's too easy; surely salvation must be hard to get: Surely this text must have a hidden agenda!

There is no hidden agenda in the text, for as is usually the case Scripture isn't that complicated— until we decide to complicate it. Grace is not hard to obtain, for God does not want anyone to perish, but to have eternal life, and so He did the work for us through Jesus Christ, so that all we need to do is to make a decision to believe God and profess our faith.

What is so hard about that?

### ***Israel had no excuse***

Romans 10:14-21

Paul has made it abundantly clear up to this point that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We are still in his fourth main point that is dealing with his assertion that God has always been faithful in His dealings with Israel, but Israel has for the most part, not accepted God's grace through Christ. In these verses, Paul makes his case that they have no excuse for their failure to believe.

10:14-15 make the point that in order for someone to respond in faith, they must first hear the message about Jesus Christ. Verses 16-18 make the point that Israel has in fact heard the message of Jesus Christ, and has not accepted it.

Now it gets really interesting because Paul is going to tell us *why* they would not believe:

*Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,*

*“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;  
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” (10:19)*

He begins by quoting from Deut. 32: the Gentiles have heard and believed the message: Horror! Apparently there were many among the Jews of those days who were not going to do anything Gentiles were doing; their prejudice was getting in the way.

*And Isaiah boldly says,*

*“I was found by those who did not seek me;  
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” (10:20)*

Isaiah 62 brings the point home; the Jews didn't want grace, so God went to the Gentiles: an insult to their pride.

*But concerning Israel he says,*

*“All day long I have held out my hands  
to a disobedient and obstinate people.” (10:21)*

Isaiah again; it would seem that the rejection of grace was nothing new for Israel, for they had been all too eager to turn their backs on God throughout their history. God had stretched out His hand to them time and time again with the same result. You might recall that God was stretching out His hands when He sent Isaiah to warn them centuries before, at the time these verses were first written down. Did they receive Isaiah's message?

No they didn't; if memory serves, didn't they see him in half to silence the message God was sending?

God has always been faithful to Israel; He was never the problem, for it was always the people who were the problem.

Before we let ourselves feel superior to anyone, let's stop and remind ourselves that we Christians have not always been the shining beacons of godly love that we are supposed to be. I might just add that our stubbornness and disobedience has been just as inexcusable (probably more so in fact) than that of the Jews. Rather than smirking, maybe we should also take these warnings to heart lest we put the Gospel to shame in the eyes of those around us.

When we get back together, we will see what Paul has to say about the salvation of the true Israel.

# Chapter 11

## ***The Remnant of Israel***

*I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

Romans 11:1-6

As chapter 11 begins, Paul moves into his next supporting point in this main section comprised of chapters 9-11. Our working theory for this section is that he is trying to prove that God has been faithful in all of His dealings with Israel, which is an issue because Israel has for the most part, rejected Christ bringing condemnation upon itself. In these verses, Paul seeks to document the obvious fact that a remnant of the Jews of his time have received the message of Christ and thus have received the grace that seems to have eluded the majority of their brethren.

The existence of this remnant is obvious for Paul himself is part of it, and is thus living proof of its existence. The question comes down to this: Did God reject Israel? Paul's answer is a resounding "no". Sadly, Israel has rejected God.

Paul's wording in verse 2a begs a question; here is what Paul said: *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew*. The question is: Did God foreknow only some of Israel, or did God foreknow all of Israel? I realize that there are at least two main teachings on this question, but I would suggest that Paul is making the point that all of Israel were chosen and foreknown by God, but when the time came, some chose to accept God's grace and the majority chose to reject it and turn away from God, a view that is consistent with what Paul has been teaching all along in this section.

Verses 3-4 remind us of the story of Elijah from 1Kings 19. In those days, Israel had also turned away from God, had killed His prophets and were coming for Elijah, but then as in Paul's time, there was a remnant of people who remained faithful to God. In verse 5, Paul says: *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace*. Personally, I prefer the rendering of the NASB: *In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice*. Maybe I'm just old fashioned, but the reason I prefer the NASB for this verse is that they translated all of the Greek words, while the NIV left one out. The word they left out is *ginomai* meaning "came into being". It may seem like a very small matter, but I think it makes "God's glorious choice" much easier to follow, for we are once again facing the question of whether God selected some for grace and rejected others. You might recall that in earlier sections we discovered that God called all of Israel (descendants of Abraham) to serve His purpose. We also saw that all of Israel has served God's purpose, even though within Israel

some people followed God and many others did not both in Paul's day, and all through Israel's history. Paul's point in these verses is entirely in harmony with previous sections of Romans: God knew in advance that some Israelites would choose to follow Jesus and that others would reject Jesus. He knew that in Paul's day, there would be a remnant of Israelites remaining faithful, while most went their own way, in other words, and there was nothing new in this situation. God had never excluded anyone from following Him, and He wasn't excluding anyone now; quite the opposite in fact.

Finally, verse 6: *And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* Once more, Paul points out the contrast between the two camps within Israel, those who follow God by faith and those who follow by Law. Those who follow God by faith have believed His message of grace and have been saved. Those who believe in Law and their own works have not believed God's message of grace and have rejected it and God as well.

### ***God Hardens Israel***

*What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written:*

*“God gave them a spirit of stupor,  
eyes that could not see  
and ears that could not hear,  
to this very day.”*

*And David says:*

*“May their table become a snare and a trap,  
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.  
May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,  
and their backs be bent forever.”*

Romans 11:7-10

My oh my, isn't this an interesting little bit of text! Yes, it is Paul's contention that God has hardened those within Israel who have rejected faith in Christ. Before we start pulling our hair out, I'll let you in on what comes later in this chapter: First, God did not cause them to reject grace; the hardening was after they had made their choice. Second, the hardening was neither final nor irreversible, and third, the hardening would paradoxically lead not only to the saving of many Gentiles, but to many of those who had been hardened.

With that in mind, let's take a closer look at the verses. The thing Israel had sought was righteousness before God by their work of following the Law. As we have already seen, this was futility itself, for righteousness before God comes from believing God, not from our own work. Notice the word "elect" in verse 7; this may confuse many because of our earlier discussions, so it is important for you to know that the Greek word for "the elect" (*eklektos*) is *NOT present in*

*this sentence*. The word used here is *ekloge* which refers to a “choice election”. What seems to be taking shape here is that there are those who have chosen to receive grace, and the others who did not, a theme that carries forward through the rest of this chapter.

Next, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 in verse 7, and from Psalm 69:22-23 in verses 9-10 to support his contention that God has hardened those who have rejected His message of grace. For our purposes here, I would remind you that this is a supporting point for a larger assertion on Paul’s part; this is not the end of the story. There is a context and a background and we mustn’t forget them.

Remember that Paul has already told us that God called Abraham’s descendants (Israel) to a purpose; they would serve God’s purpose by being the people from whom Messiah would come, and they would provide a core group of believers who would begin the process of spreading the Good News of salvation throughout the world; this was a calling to service. Messiah has already come by the time Paul wrote this passage, there was in existence that core group of Jews who had decided to believe God’s message and follow Jesus Christ; Paul was one of them, as was Peter and many others. At the same time, many other Jews had determined not to believe God’s salvation message; they had rejected Jesus and by doing so, they rejected the One who had sent Him. ***This was by their own choosing.***

Yet God was still working His purpose through them, even though they had rejected His message, for Israel had been called to God’s service and He was still using them for His service, even though they didn’t yet realize it. In order for God to use the “others” it was necessary for them to be hardened.

How this is to be accomplished is what Paul will explain when we get together next time.

### ***Hardening Brings Blessing***

*Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!*

Romans 11:11-12

Paul’s next point is that the hardening described in the last section will be a blessing for both Gentiles and Jews. Here he begins by repeating his earlier point that the hardening of unbelieving Israel is not irreversible. As a result of the hardening, the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles, something not likely to happen if all of Israel had listened and accepted it. Again he makes reference to Deuteronomy 32:21 and its assertion that Gentiles coming to God will make Israel envious; will Israel repent when they see so many Gentiles blessed by God? If they do, the reunion will be sweet indeed!

*I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

Romans 11:13-16

As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul seems to understand better than anyone the power and possibility of what was happening in the Gentile world. Most of his own people had rejected God's Son, and as a result God hardened them so that they would not want to hear the message. Then the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles, and many had responded to it and been blessed, which in turn would be likely to get the attention of many Jews who had not been willing to listen before. Again, Paul of all people knew that they were not "bad" people; their hearts were in the right place, for they sincerely wanted to follow God, and they thought that they were following God by rejecting the Gospel. The root cause for their rejection was error to be sure, but they had been blinded by their own traditions; they could only comprehend following the Law by their own strength as a means to righteousness, and as we know, this was never God's intention.

When these well-intentioned people saw the way God was working among the Gentiles, they would surely come to their senses— and a great many did just that, to the glory of God.

### ***The Olive Tree***

*If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.*

Romans 11:17-21

Moving into Paul's next point, we have an olive tree being used as a metaphor for judgment and hope. In these first several verses, Paul is addressing Gentiles who are likened to a wild olive branch that has been grafted into a cultured olive tree. The grafting has taken place so that these wild branches can take the place of the original branches that were broken off from the tree.

The tree represents the Israel of God, and when those new branches (Gentiles) are grafted into the tree, it is the tree that supports and nourishes these new branches and not the other way around, thus the new branches must not think themselves superior to the old ones (17-18). The old branches were torn away from the tree by their unbelief; the new branches were grafted in

by their faith (19-20). Now comes the warning: If those new branches allow themselves to become arrogant and superior, they too can be broken off and replaced (21).

*Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!*

Romans 11:22-24

The warning for Gentiles continues, and the message of hope for the Jews is given in these verses. If the unbelief of hardened Israel does not continue, they will be welcomed back to the tree of faith, and it will be easier to graft the branch back to the tree from which it came, then it was to graft in the wild branches. What is the point?

To the Gentiles, Paul is warning them that they must continue in their faith with humility before God, and to the Jews Paul is saying that they are welcome to come home in faith whenever they choose to do so. Essentially, this is what he has been teaching throughout this larger unit of Romans and this metaphor is being used to begin to sum things up as we near the close of the unit. In the next section, verses 25-32, he will drop the metaphor and tell his readers in plain language about God's Kingdom strategy. It is very important that we bear this in mind when we study it, for if we don't, we are likely to come up with all sorts of erroneous conclusions.

### ***The Salvation of Israel***

Our text here is Romans 11:25-32, and as I mentioned last time, they follow the context set up in 17-25. This is very important to keep in mind, especially for those who use the NIV. The reason I say this is that the NIV has left a word out, the word *gar* which means "for or because". Verse 25 begins in the NIV, "I do not want you..." and the Greek (as well as the NASB, KJV and many others) actually says, "*For* I do not..." I am pointing this out because that little word "for" connects 25 ff. with 17-24 and the metaphor of the olive tree.

*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:*

*"The deliverer will come from Zion;  
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.  
And this is my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins."*

Romans 11:25-27

The mystery Paul refers to here is the same as the olive tree, the means by which God brings all peoples together through Christ. Old Israel has experienced a hardening *in part* until the full number of the Gentiles has *come in*, meaning that those among the Jews who had rejected the Son have been hardened to allow the Gentiles to enter God's family. Thus "all Israel" comprised of both Jew and Gentile may be saved by faith in Christ. This is followed by a fascinating quote from Isaiah 59:20-21 that so clearly refers to the New Covenant (see also Jeremiah 31:33-34). If this seems hard for you, remember that the Old Covenant Law does not take away sins and can only condemn a person. When we put this together it is clear that "all Israel" must refer to those who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, and cannot refer to ethnic Israel.

*As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.*

Romans 11:28-32

If you only read this paragraph, then your understanding of it will be quite different than if you have been following along with us through the whole of chapter 11; you will probably conclude that Paul is saying that all Jews will be saved in the end whether or not they have believed, and some actually teach it that way.

But they are mistaken.

Remember, Paul is elaborating on the olive tree metaphor of 17-24 which is a warning to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are the branch from the wild olive tree that was grafted into the cultured tree after old branches were torn away because of their unbelief, and they must not become arrogant or they too can be torn out (11:22-23). Taken all together, these verses tell much the same story as do verses 11-16.

Verse 28 carries a meaning similar to that of 11:23-24. Some of the branches of the olive tree have been cut off for their unbelief, but even though they have chosen to be God's enemies by rejecting the Gospel, God still cares for them because they were called to His service through the patriarchs, and if they will only repent, He will take them back in a New York minute, because His goal in all of this is to give His mercy not only to Gentiles, but to all people if they will only believe Him and His offer of grace through faith.

### **God's Way is Right**

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?"*

*Or who has been his counselor?”  
“Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?”  
For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

#### Romans 11:32-35

When we began this section, Romans 9-11, we began with a working theory that Paul was writing it to demonstrate that God has always been faithful in His dealings with Israel. In spite of the paradox that Israel had become, Paul has demonstrated clearly in these chapters that God is in fact faithful to Israel, even though Israel hasn't always made it easy for God to do so. In case you missed it, the paradox was that even though Israel had been God's covenant people, when God sent His Son to redeem them, most Jews rejected Him and found themselves at odds with God.

We have seen Paul lay out the history of God's dealing with Israel, we have seen the paradox, and we have seen the mystery of the present age unfolding before our eyes, the mystery by which God hardened those Jews who chose not to follow Him so that God might also save the Gentiles and redeem all Mankind who would accept His favor, and how that would in turn help many more Jews to come to repentance in the process.

Without a doubt, God has, and continues to do a mighty work of grace right out in the open for all to see. Thus, here at the summit, with this great scene spread out before him, Paul gives us a song of praise to God for His awesome work to reconcile all peoples to Himself. I don't know about you, but I am inclined to join Paul in giving God the glory and praise He so richly deserves.

#### ***Romans 9-11 Recap***

We have completed the fourth main section of Romans, the proposition of which was that God is faithful in all of His dealings with Israel. Remember that Romans is a persuasive essay on Christian doctrine, and I have recapped the prior main sections so that you can easily see Paul's persuasive structure in making his case for Christ. As I mentioned when we began this section, Paul makes four points in support of his proposition; here is his supporting evidence, point by point:

Proposition: *God is faithful in all of His dealings with Israel*

1. Israel has become a paradox (9:1-5)

A. Israel is accursed (9:1-3)

B. Israel is blessed (9:4-5)

2. There is a distinction between ethnic Israel and Spiritual Israel (9:6-29)

A. God has always been faithful (9:6-13)

1. God's Word concerning Israel has not failed (9:6a)

2. There are two Israels (9:6b)

3. Ethnic Israel exists by God's choice (9:7-13)

a. The choice of Isaac (9:7-9)

b. The choice of Jacob (9:10-13)

B. God has every right to choose who will serve His purpose (9:14-18)

1. God's righteousness challenged (9:14)

2. God's sovereignty in election for service (9:15-16)

3. God's purpose can be served by people who are not "saved" (9:17-18)

C. God used ethnic Israel to produce spiritual Israel (9:19-29)

1. The objection (9:19)

2. The attitude that produces the objection is rebuked (9:20-21)

3. Spiritual Israel has been God's purpose all along (9:22-24)

4. Prophetic confirmation of God's purpose (9:25-29)

With these first two points, Paul has established that Israel is a paradox because it is both cursed and blessed, and then shown that this seeming paradox is caused by the fact that all along there have been two groups within the Israelites, those who serve God by Law and those who serve God by faith; Then Paul goes on to demonstrate that all descendants of Abraham were called to God's service, but this does not mean, as many assume, that they were "saved" in the sense that they had the gift of salvation and eternal life, for that did not come into the picture until Christ came upon the scene. Some among the Israelites add *faith in God*, but most made the choice to depend upon their own ability to be righteous by following the Law, something no one could quite manage. In spite of this, the Nation saw the coming of Christ, and produced the nucleus of the church ("spiritual Israel"), which was the service to which all had been called, and all of this had been foretold of by the prophets God has sent to them.

Proposition: *God is faithful in all of His dealings with Israel*

3. Israel chose Law over grace (9:30-10:21)

A. Personal righteousness versus the righteousness of God (9:30-10:3)

1. Why the Gentiles accepted God's righteousness (9:30)

2. The Jews lost their way (9:31-33)

3. The Jews' rejection of God's righteousness (10:1-3)

B. Christ alone is the source of saving righteousness (10:4-133)

1. All must choose between righteousness by works and righteousness by faith in Christ (10:4)

2. The futility of righteousness by action of Law (10:5)

3. Saving righteousness comes by trusting Christ's work on the cross, not our own righteousness in following the Law (10:6-10)

4. God's righteousness is available to Jew and Gentile alike (10:11-13)

C. The Jews have not believed in Christ, and their unbelief is without excuse (10:14-21)

1. The necessary prerequisites of saving faith (10:14-15)

2. Most Jews have not believed the Gospel (10:16)

3. The Jews' problem is not ignorance but stubbornness of will (10:17-21).

As you can see, Paul has clearly shown that none of us can achieve righteousness in God's sight by our own strength and will, but if we will accept His grace by faith in Jesus Christ, all can be saved at any time.

Proposition: *God is faithful in all of His dealings with Israel*

4. The salvation of "spiritual" Israel is assured (11:1-32)

A. God's true Israel is the remnant chosen by his grace (11:1-6)

1. God has not rejected His people (11:1-2a)

2. God had a remnant of believers in the Old Testament (11:2b-4)

3. Those under grace are God's New Covenant Israel (11:5-6)

B. Unbelieving Israel has been hardened (11:7-10)

C. The hardening of unbelieving Israel becomes a blessing for Gentile and Jew alike (11:11-16)

D. The olive tree as a metaphor of judgment and hope (11:17-24)

1. Warning to Gentiles (11:17-22)
2. Hope for hardened Jews (11:23-24)
- E. God's plan for Israel's salvation (11:25-32)
  1. The mystery of Israel's salvation (11:25-27)
  2. God's continuing love for Israel (11:28-29)
  3. God's ultimate purpose is mercy (11:30-32)

The overriding theme in this section is the assurance of the salvation of those who will choose to accept God's mercy and grace. Even though God has hardened those Jews who have thus far refused to accept His grace, the way is open to them to come back into His arms, and as a result of God's actions, many over the centuries have chosen to do so. Thus, Paul has demonstrated his point in support of his proposition that God has always been faithful to Israel.

Proposition: *God is faithful in all of His dealings with Israel*

5. Paul's hymn of praise to God for His faithfulness (11:33-36)

In this section, Paul has clearly made a powerful case that God has always been faithful in His dealings with Israel in spite of the fact that Israel has not always been faithful to God.

In the next section, Paul will turn to living the Christian life with a series of arguments that confound many; not for their complexity, but for their simplicity, not for their difficulty, but because they are counter-intuitive. See you then!

### ***Moving on to Application***

The last major section in Romans is comprised of chapters 12-15, and takes an entirely different tone than we have seen so far. Many commentators assert that chapters 1-11 are "doctrinal" in nature, while 12-15 are "practical" and in a sense they are right. However, I maintain that all of them are "doctrinal" because they are all teachings, which is what "doctrine" means. To me, the main difference between 1-11 and 12-15 is that 1-11 teaches spiritual truths of the Christian faith, while 12-15 applies these truths into daily practice.

We might notice, for example, that in 6-8, Paul sets out the reality of the new life in Christ (6) and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (8) in general theological terms. In those chapters Paul tells us all that God did for us when we were saved by grace, one might say. In 12-15, however, Paul shows us what this looks like in much more specific terms. In 6:4 he tells us that

in baptism we were raised up from death to live a new life; now he will tell us precisely what the content of that life should be.

This section is divided into two parts, the first of which is 12:1-13:14, and teaches the ethics of the Christian life. These ethics are things which are and are not Christlike, since our goal in this life is to be as much like Him as possible. For instance, if I were to remind you that as Christians we should not run around town raping, robbing and pillaging, would you be surprised or offended? How about if I told you that it isn't cool to have an affair with your best friend's wife (or husband)? These are the kinds of ethics Paul gets into in 12:1-13:14; the non-negotiable kinds of things.

14:1-15:18, on the other hand, is not so obvious— and infinitely more interesting for the modern reader. This section, rather than seeming like a list of rules, covers matters of opinion and teaches that there are many areas in which a Christian is free to choose his or her unique way of doing things. Paul will make the case that we are to continue in unity and love without attempting to bend others to our will in matters of opinion. Of course, he also will teach us that in exercising our freedom in these areas, we need to be sensitive to the needs of others and thus avoid causing them to stumble.

In short dear reader, this is a thrill-packed section that we'll jump into next time; see you there!

### ***Be Transformed***

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Romans 12:1-2

As all of you know, whenever we see the word “therefore”, we are reading a passage that draws a conclusion from what has preceded it. While that is certainly true here, this one isn't just referring to the verses just concluded, for this is the beginning of a new unit (12-15) and thus, “therefore” is drawing a conclusion from the preceding unit (1-11), which is a very important distinction. The first unit in Romans discussed grace; the second unit discusses our response to grace. Thus, Paul is telling us that in response to God's amazing grace, we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

Verse 1 is, in a sense, a counterpoint to the Old Testament worship in which animals were sacrificed and rituals were observed. Notice the presence of the words “offer”, “sacrifice” and “worship”, all three of which are terms that pertain to worship in the Old Testament. The old system of worship involved symbols and ceremonies, but worship in the New Testament involves “spirit and truth”. Consequently, the proper and true manner of worship for the Christian is for us to offer *ourselves* to God as living sacrifices. Please understand: This is no platitude; it

is an imperative. A fair question right about now would be, “OK, but just exactly how do I do that?”

You will no doubt be relieved when I tell you that Paul has provided the answer in verse 2: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

My goodness, how we love to quote this, but how many of us actually do it? How many of us actually believe that it is possible? Surely this is nothing more than an abstract ideal, a goal that cannot be realized in this life!

Maybe we should all pause and re-read it; look carefully at the words, the grammar...

Holy heart attack! This is no abstraction; it too is an imperative!

So here's another question: Would the Apostle Paul command us to do something if it is impossible? Perhaps we need to think about this some more. Do you recall what Paul told us regarding Israel's failure to attain righteousness? Yes, that's right: They never obtained righteousness because their faith was in *their ability* to conform to the Law, but what God wanted was for them to put their faith *in Him*... and with God, all things are possible.

Notice that in the imperative of verse 2, there is a contrast, a duality that is set up by the word “but” “Do not be conformed... but be transformed” Thus we have a choice to make: Either we live as the world does with its values, activities and ways of thinking, or we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our minds so that we have an entirely new way of thinking with different values that lead us to a different way of life; this is our choice, and to be quite candid with you, it is very much like the choice that Israel had to make.

As Paul continues in 12:3-13:14, he will fill in many blanks for us, so that we can see more clearly how to accomplish this task; I don't know about you, but I can hardly wait to see what comes next!

### ***Lesson 1: Humble Service***

Romans 12:3-8

Paul set out his proposition in verses 1-2, that we offer ourselves as living sacrifices and be transformed by the renewing of our minds as a response to grace— in verses 3-8 we have our first lesson on how to go about it: Serve the body of Christ in humility.

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (12:3)*

So, it would seem that the first step in the transformative process is that we adopt an attitude of humility. Right away, we can see that not being conformed to this world was something Paul was very serious about (v. 2) for in this age of “game”, “swagger” and “bling” humility is very

much out of style. Verse 4 uses the metaphor of our bodies in the same way that Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 12 as he shows that each of us has a unique part to play in the Body of Christ. While this is easy enough to grasp, he takes another shot at the attitudes of this world in verse 5 when he says *each member belongs to all the others*. I can't tell you how many times I have seen Christians bristle at that one.

In verses 6-8 Paul refers to spiritual gifts that each of us has received by the Holy Spirit.

I hope you will consider this carefully: In a context of humble service, a context that is not only counter-intuitive but also counter-cultural for most of us, Paul tells us to exercise our spiritual gifts in humble service to the Body of Christ. Think about the magnitude of the implication of this...

Not only are we to adopt an attitude of true and honest humility, not only are we to consider our positions as members of and belonging to the Body of Christ, but we are to serve the Body of Christ. Yet even more striking than that, we are to rely upon our spiritual gift from God in our service, which is to say that we are *not* to rely on our own strength, ability or talent, but on God's grace alone.

Now, let's think about what we've already seen in Romans, again let's consider why Israel did not obtain righteousness by the Law. They relied on their own strength and ability to follow the Law, but they did not rely on God *for His righteousness*. How are we to live as Christians? We are to rely on God in all things to serve His purpose and not our own.

Just think, Paul is just getting started in these life lessons! See you next time...

## ***Lesson 2: Put Love into Action***

Romans 12:9-16

Paul continues in these verses with his discussion of our response to grace. Here, he sets the tone with verse 9: *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good*. Our response to God's grace must be one of love, both love for God and love for others, and this love must be sincere. It is interesting that Paul should modify this sincere love statement with the concept of hating what is evil and clinging to what is good; it would appear that in our sincere love, we are to maintain the highest of ethical standards, not allowing ourselves to misuse our new freedom.

So then, what does love in action look like in practice?

Paul begins shedding light on this question in the verses that follow, first of all with an emphasis on what we should do to put love into action:

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves (12:10)*. Because our response to grace is that we love others, we should be devoted to one another, and we should put others ahead of ourselves. *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord (12:11)*. Because our response to grace is that we love God, we should serve Him with

enthusiasm always. Because our response to grace is one of love, our attitudes should reflect that love for God and other people: *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (12:12)*. Since we have a whole new attitude because of the grace we have received, our love should result in generosity toward other people: *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality (12:13)*.

Many commentators refer to this section as the "Law of Christ" but at least for me, it doesn't really read that way; I highly doubt that Paul is intending to give us a list of rules that we check off as we go. Instead, I think he is simply pointing out some no-brainers as if to say that since we love God and love others, these are the natural kinds of things that should follow. In the next three verses, his emphasis shifts slightly, but he is still speaking of sincere love:

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

#### Romans 12:14-16

As we read these verses, notice that they are not things that are common in this world. I've never met someone who blessed their oppressors, for instance; have you? I don't always see people rejoicing with their friends who are rejoicing, for all too often a person sees their friend rejoicing while harboring resentment because their friend was fortunate in an area where they hadn't been as fortunate. Harmony is surely lacking in our world, while pride and conceit are commonplace; and so many decline to associate with the less fortunate. Real sincere love is a very rare thing in our world, but within the church, it is *supposed to be a given*.

In fact, the apparent lack of love in some church bodies is a sore subject for many people. Some of them complain loudly and criticize bitterly about the lack of love in this or that church, some even leave church entirely because of it. While on the one hand I might be inclined to feel for such people, on the other hand, after going through these verses, I can't help thinking that they aren't exhibiting love either. Thus, I'll add a response to grace that Paul alluded to in verse 14, but hasn't mentioned yet by name: Sincere love requires quite a lot of forgiveness, for all of us are works in progress!

### **Lesson 3: Concerning Revenge**

Romans 12:17-21

In 12:1-16 Paul has discussed our response to grace with a series of short statements that stem from the theme of sincere love, but in 17 ff. he seems to focus on one particular subject: Revenge. While the previous section can be said to deal mostly with our relationships within the Body of Christ, this section would seem more (hopefully) to deal with those outside of the Body of Christ. Paul set up his new theme in verse 17: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone*. Our natural human inclination when we have been

harmful or insulted is to strike back, to get even, but that is not the reaction of sincere love, and it has been rendered obsolete by grace.

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (12:18).* We are not to stir up trouble or carry on in a provocative manner with other people, we should not be tossing insults and unkindness around, nor should we be looking for disputes, for our response to grace makes that kind of living hypocritical. God has forgiven us, He has shown love and mercy to us; do we honor Him by stirring up trouble with other people?

*Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:*

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.*

Romans 12:19-20

If we are harmed by another, even if it is a violent attack; our response is to show God's mercy and love to the other party, it is not for us to avenge the wrong we have suffered. If avenging or retribution or punishment is required, that is God's job, and since God has been faithful in dealing with us, He can be counted on to be faithful in the final disposition of our having been wronged.

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (12:21).*

There, that's the "official" lesson portion— now let's get real.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Romans 12:1-2

As we saw when we covered these verses earlier, this is not empty talk; there are serious implications in these words. These injunctions require a response to grace, a response that brings about a whole new way of living and thinking, and more than anything else, they require that we trust God like never before. Yes, dear reader, these verses call upon each of us to put it all on the line in faith. I can't think of anything that puts this new way of life to the test more than being the victim of a violent attack of some sort, for these are the things of nightmares, fear and emotional as well as physical trauma. As though that isn't enough, here we are called to respond in love to the very one(s) who have caused it all; this is about the most counter-intuitive thing I can think of... but that's just me.

Paul still has not mentioned the word, but what he is describing is forgiveness.

The reality is that a victim of violence will not move on in life if they cannot find a way to let go of the anger, rage and hurt of their experience and this is not likely to happen if they lust for revenge. I can't speak for anyone else, but I'm not sure if I can do this on my own, in fact I doubt it very much.

But there is good news...

Grace has a dual purpose. First grace takes our sin away, making it possible to receive the gift of eternal life, and second it provides us with the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and it is by the strength and mercy of the Holy Spirit that we can overcome serious traumas of whatever kind in this life, not by our own will. God has given us the path and the resources to travel the path of this life; the only question that remains is that ancient question we all must answer: Will we trust God?

And with that question, we have come full circle; back to the where we began.

## Chapter 13

### **Lesson 4: Dealing with Government**

*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*

Romans 13:1-5

Paul's message, simply stated, is that human government is ordained by God, and that's all I should have to say about it. Yet even though human government is ordained by God, human government exists in a corrupted world environment, and we should not pretend to be shocked when it turns out to be corrupt: It happens. What is really instructive in this teaching is that the government Paul was referring to had a nasty habit of persecuting Paul and his readers; yes, maybe we should reflect on that for a while.

If I had been Paul, I might want to write something quite different on this topic, but if I had, or if he had, then a great disservice would have been done to the Gospel. God did not call us to serve His kingdom so that we could engage in political action, for His Kingdom is not of this world. Instead, He has called us to share the Gospel, to share His love with those who have not yet heard it, to nurture and mentor other, younger Christians to maturity in the faith, not to protest stupid court decisions or corruption in Congress or the White House... or wherever it may exist in your location. I will add that if we did a better job of serving His purpose in a free society, it is quite likely that a very different group of people would be elected to represent us, without our ever needing to bring up politics.

By the way, when I teach such self explanatory texts as this one, this is often where I toss out a question, a rhetorical one of course: When you are driving your car around town, do you observe the speed limit, or do behave as the pagans do?

That one gets a groan from the group every time...

*This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

Romans 13:6-7

Taxes: Nobody likes taxes, except the ones somebody else must pay. Here in America, we have a horrible tax system, and I will boldly declare that if the entire Tax Code went up for a vote as is, and if it didn't already exist, no one would vote for it; no one has even read the whole thing, and the people who enforce it don't even understand it, and if you don't believe me, ask a tax lawyer!

Now ask yourself, how was the tax system Paul lived under? Well... it was horrible as well. Money is not supposed to be our primary concern in this life; our priority is supposed to be on things that are above, so why should the inequities of the tax system be our priority? Paul's message is pay them what they want and get on with serving our Lord in peace and love, for that is what we are here for.

Yes, I know... I'm gritting my teeth too, but that only goes to show that we have a long way to go to attain maturity in the faith.

### **Lesson 5: Love**

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Romans 13:8-10

In this short passage, Paul is nothing short of profound; deep in fact. Yet it is so simple that we might just fly past it and not notice how profound it is; a second grade child can easily understand it, and it requires a mature adult to miss it— that is how simple it is.

*Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

If we think of love as a mere emotion or feeling, maybe we can miss this, but godly love is not an emotion, it is a commitment to put the interests of other people ahead of our own, and love in action puts the interests of everyone ahead of our own. If we actually do this, then we will not do anything to offend or hurt them, and if we love God then we will not do anything to hurt or offend God. We will not do this because somebody told us that we must, we will do this because we *want to*.

In short, this is the transformation that Paul spoke of in 12:1-2; this is love in action from 12:9-16.

There are times when I grow weary of people telling me that the Bible never tells us *how* we should accomplish the Christian life; yes, dear reader, I grow weary of such remarks:

Put your love into action!

“But how do I do that?”

Love your neighbor as yourself.

“But that is **too hard.**”

No, it isn't too hard! Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength.”

“But how do I do that?”

Make a decision that you love God, and then commit to stick with it and trust the Holy Spirit to give you the strength you need.

“But that's **too hard.**”

Dear Lord, open our ears that we might hear, open our eyes that we might see, open our hearts that we might believe so that we might become like little children and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Lesson 6: Walk in the Light**

*And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Romans 13:11-14

These verses are the summation for this entire section (12:1-13:14) and serve to bring the message into sharp focus. Remember that Paul has been teaching about our response to God's grace, giving us a clear picture of what our daily lives should look like. Here he sums it all up with a metaphor: Light.

*And do this, understanding the present time (13:11)* is the transition, referring back to the prior section discussing love in action. It is time to wake up, for the day is coming when the Lord Jesus will return. Notice the urgency in what Paul is talking about here; time's a wasting! It may seem funny to us all these centuries later to read this urgency, but it is important for us to always bear in mind the fact that Jesus is coming. His literal return could be at any time, or it could be in 10,000 years, and no one knows for sure either way. Yet He came for every single recipient of this letter a long time ago. He came for all of those who have ever read this letter in the centuries that have followed, and He will come for us soon enough, thus Paul's urgency applies to each of us: Wake up!

Paul's metaphor of living in the light of day is clear enough; we are to behave in a respectable manner, not as people do in the wee hours when nobody is looking. In verse 13, he mentions

several behaviors, and I think they are obvious enough, so I will only comment on two of them; dissention and jealousy.

I try not to miss opportunities to make a plea for Christian unity, and this is certainly such an opportunity. Must we continue fighting among ourselves, arguing over every little doctrinal difference of opinion? Must we be jealous about the name on the sign in front of the building? Is all of that really so essential?

I don't believe that it is, do you?

Maybe I'm just a fool, but I think that the times we are living in today are much too serious to indulge ourselves in this sort of thing. Our calling is to build the Body of Christ, so let's get to building instead of tearing it apart. Let's clothe ourselves in Christ, and answer our calling instead of glorifying ourselves in endless arguments.

Incidentally, this is a transitional thought that leads us into the next section, verses 14:1-15:13 which discuss our *liberty to hold different opinions*.

### ***About Judging Others***

Romans 14:1-12

Paul's discussion of our response to grace now takes a different path, for Paul is discussing different opinions among believers. He begins in 14:1-3. Verse 1 sets the tone for this discussion: *Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters*. It could be that for many Christians, the concept of "disputable matters" is a little bit of a shock; yes, there are matters over which we can each have our own opinions!

Paul uses eating habits as an example; specifically over whether or not a person should eat meat, something that many discuss in our times. Who cares if someone else has a different opinion on eating meat? If you eat meat, good for you; if you don't, good for you; there is nothing to fight about. Neither party is superior to the other, no matter what anybody says.

In verses 4-9, he raises the discussion up a notch: *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand (14:4)*. There is neither a brother nor sister in Christ anywhere on earth who is *my* servant; they are all servants of Jesus Christ just like I am, so how can I expect to be their judge? Our Lord will do the judging, and I *must* accept all of His servants, for if He has accepted them, I must accept them in love.

Verses 10-12 bring this point all the way home:

*You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:*

*“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
‘every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”*

*So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.*

I can't speak for anyone else, but I think that I have enough to worry about without compounding matters by trying to place myself above anyone else.

### **Christian Liberty**

After his discussion of judging others in verses 1-12, Paul moves onto Christian Liberty and the responsibilities that come with it. He divides this discussion into four points:

**First**, we should be willing to sacrifice some of our liberty for the sake of others:

*Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.*

Romans 14:13-15

It's interesting to notice that this begins with Paul saying we should stop judging others, isn't it? Once again, he uses the example of dietary practices, but this applies to many other things. If a brother or sister thinks rock and roll is the Devil's music, then for his sake, I'll play something else when he's around. (My Grandmother used to think jazz was the Devil's music!) The point is that we should have respect for the conscience of others, even though we may (rightly) believe them to be mistaken, for to get in their face may well cause them a crisis of faith and being "right" isn't the point of love.

**Second**, don't allow what your conscience knows to be good to be spoken of as evil:

*Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.*

Romans 14:16-18

There can be some natural tension between this point and the last point, but if we are careful in our discernment, we will notice the difference. In the first point, we are speaking entirely of opinions; what we eat or drink. The second point goes to matters of truth. Thus, there are two sides to Christian liberty: on the one hand, we may need to sacrifice minor matters of opinion for the sake of someone else. On the other hand, we must defend the truth of God and His

Word. Here's a different example: Suppose a brother announces that smoking cigarettes is a sin. He is exercising his right to his opinion, but in the process, he is falsely teaching the Word, for smoking is never mentioned in Scripture, and there is no principle to apply to it that does not involved taking something out of its context. As a teacher of the Word, I will feel obligated to correct the Scriptural error (in love) while acknowledging that he has every right not to like smoking. I would sacrifice my liberty by not smoking around him. For the record, I am not now, nor have I ever been a smoker; I think it's really stupid... but not a sin. See the difference?

**Third**, we should only do things that build others up in Christ:

*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.*

Romans 14:19-21

Being "right" isn't the standard we are called to; the standard we are called to is love; putting the interests of others ahead of our own. Thus, in all that we do, we should do it for the benefit of others, and if that means that we skip something we like, so what?

**Fourth**, we should be true to our own convictions:

*So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Romans 14:22-23

These two verses tie the first three points together, but in an awkward way, at least for the modern reader. Paul carried through his example of dietary practices, which are not nearly the big deal now that they were in his time. Yet the principle is clear enough; we should, in all things, act and live according to our faith. What does the Christian faith hold as a priority above everything else? Simply stated, it's love God, love your neighbor. Thus, in all that we do, we must put God first and foremost, and then put our neighbor ahead of ourselves. I'm quite certain that if we remember to live that way, we'll have nothing at all to worry about.

# Chapter 15

## ***Living in Unity and Hope***

The third and final supporting point in this section is found in 15:1-13 and shows us that we are intended to live in unity and hope. Paul has broken this passage into three sections:

**First**, he shows us that selfless service brings about a unified testimony:

*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 15:1-6

In these verses, Paul seems to be raising the bar to the highest level, the level of Christ Himself. How are we to get through this life of serving others? By having a whole new attitude, that of Jesus, who, in everything that He said and did, put others first so that God's purpose might be accomplished. Is this too much to ask of us?

No, not at all, for remember what we've learned about grace— it provides not only forgiveness of sins, but everything we need to live our lives as followers of Jesus, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

**Second**, through Christ's selfless service, Jew and Gentile glorify God together:

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:*

*"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name."*

*Again, it says,*

*"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."*

*And again,*

*"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him."*

*And again, Isaiah says,  
“The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope.*

Romans 15:7-12

Through Jesus, God has been glorified through both Jew and Gentile. Through Jesus Christ, God can be glorified through both you and me. When we set aside our disagreements, our differences, our selves, we can be one in Christ, just as we were intended to be. This is a very simple idea; it is easy to say and easy to write, but it is not always easy to practice.

But it isn't as hard as we might think. We have the Holy Spirit within us, to lead, comfort, instruct and strengthen us, just as soon as we are willing to hear what He has to say to us. Do you believe this? Abraham did, and it was credited to him as righteousness. To follow Jesus Christ, we must believe the promises of God, and to live as though they had all already been accomplished; this is faith in action, and faith in action must of necessity be exercised by putting love into action. This is Paul's teaching in Romans, and it is the challenge before us today.

**Finally**, Paul offers a prayer that we might all live in hope:

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13

Amen.

### ***Paul's View of his Ministry***

Romans 15:14-22

At this point, Paul shifts entirely the focus of his message; what has been persuasive in nature now becomes more of a personal reflection. I hope you have read these verses, because we can glean a great insight about Paul's attitude and frame of mind in general and then compare his attitude to our own.

Verses 14-16 begin this reflection in an interesting way: Paul acknowledges that his recipients are fully able to not only understand, but to instruct one another in matters concerning faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, he tells them that he has boldly repeated certain things to them in this letter, so that they might appreciate them fully, so that they might remember the amazing grace of our Lord. He has done this by the grace God has given him as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and why was he sent as Apostle to the Gentiles? He did it so that they might be an acceptable offering to God. Notice that in all of this discussion, Paul is motivated to endless work for the sake of God's purpose, and the well being of others; not for himself.

*Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.*

Romans 15:17-19a

What does Paul do when he is serving God; where does his strength come from? He *glories in Christ* in his service; he is not taking glory from his own “greatness”. What is Paul willing to speak of? He is willing to speak only of what *God has done* through him, not what great things he himself has done. Whatever Paul may have accomplished for Christ has been done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I should imagine that each one of us, and that certainly includes me, could benefit greatly by having a similar attitude.

Once again, he mentions that he has always wanted to work where no one else has already preached the Word, among Gentiles who have not yet heard about Jesus. Interesting isn't it? God's purpose is that the Gospel should be proclaimed to all people, and here is the great Apostle to the Gentiles, not only teaching this as a fact, but also putting it into action and going into mission fields where he had to start completely from scratch so that God might be glorified among the Gentiles. Here, dear reader is an example to follow: We should seek out ways to serve God's purpose in a manner that would bring Him maximum glory, even though this may require greater effort from us; such is the lot of a servant of God, and a glorious lot it is!

### ***Romans: A Summation***

*Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Romans 16:25-27

As Paul moves on from 15:19b-16:24, he makes personal comments about his upcoming plans very similar to what he said in chapter 1, and then gives a series of personal greetings to individuals, finally coming to these verses with which he closes the letter. These verses, considered by most scholars to be a doxology express Paul's praise to God for his ministry and for the message of the Gospel that he has brought to the Gentiles. I've been wondering for a couple of weeks now how best to treat this last section in Romans; how to conclude this study, and until yesterday morning I had no clue what I would do at this point.

Yesterday morning, I was teaching a class from Hebrews 8, and near the end, a woman asked me a question. It was a really hard question, not so much because of its complexity, but

because she phrased it in a way that I wasn't sure what she was asking. It struck me at the time that she was thinking out loud; that perhaps she wasn't completely sure what she was asking, or of how to put it into words. There was something in it about a rather difficult neighbor and weeding flower beds near his property...

That's when I had the answer to the question that I wasn't sure she had actually asked, and that answer really sums up Paul's message about Jesus Christ here in Romans...

Grace has a twofold effect: It is available to anyone who will accept it and follow Jesus, and when we accept it, our sins are forgiven and taken away entirely, which is the first effect of having received grace. The second effect is that it begs a response, but that response is not simply a legal requirement of some sort, it is a response of love. Our loving response to grace is that we let the ways of this world go and follow Jesus Christ in selfless service to Him and through Him to those around us. This means that we let Him be first in us.

That difficult neighbor was the key in my mind yesterday, so I told the woman that since Jesus is within us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we are His Ambassadors, the closest thing to meeting Jesus face to face that the neighbor is ever likely to experience in this life is meeting you: When he meets you, in effect, he is meeting Jesus. If this is our attitude, we need not worry about an encounter with a difficult neighbor, or anyone else for that matter, for it will be Him in us who does the talking, we will know exactly what to do; get out of His way.

I think that more than anything else, this is Paul's message in Romans, for this is love in action, and it is that mystery that was hidden in ages past, but that has now become known; *to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

Now, dear reader, all we need to do is to let Him reign in our lives.