

Romans

Many people read Paul's letter to the Romans as some form of theological treatise. However, this letter is, as are his others, an occasional document.

Paul did not found the church in Rome. The purpose of this letter was Paul's desire to go to Spain to preach the good news. He wanted to use Rome as his base of operation as he had used Antioch in Syria as his base of operations for what we call his three missionary journey's.

Paul wrote this letter towards the end of his missionary journey's from Corinth in the winter of 56-57. We know that during his journey's he had seen various problems in the church in Corinth and with the Judaizers in the Galatian churches. When we read Romans carefully, we see these issues addressed.

There really isn't any disagreement that Romans is authentically Pauline, but there is some disagreement about the last chapter – whether or not it is apart of the same letter. We will address that issue when we get there.

There is also some disagreement about chapters 9-11. The argument is that you can take out chapters 9-11 and the letter flows naturally from the end of chapter 8 to the beginning of chapter 12. I don't see much merit in that. We know that Paul dictated his letters, and we know that he would often go out on some tangent for a bit.

Chapter 1

1:1 – Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel/good news of God—

Paul begins by identifying himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. The Greek word that we translate as servant is *doulas*. A *doulas* in the Greek culture was a bondservant – someone who had sold themselves into slavery to another person.

What a powerful image! Paul had sold out to Jesus! He considered himself owned by Jesus.

He then calls himself an apostle, which meant a person sent by another to represent them. Paul was sent by Jesus to represent Jesus to others, in particular to the Gentiles.

So, Paul begins this letter by making it clear that he is both a servant and representative of Jesus Christ.

What was his mission? The gospel – but really the good news of God.

1:2 – the gospel/good news he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life^[a] was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power^[b] by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

There exists some controversy over this passage, in particular verse four. Some say that Paul was making a concession to the church in Rome of which many had accepted an adoptionist Christology.

What is an adoptionist Christology? It is the belief that became the Son of God at some time after the beginning of his earthly life, and that God adopted him to become the Messiah.

I'm not so sure about verse four. The NIV reads: who through the Spirit of holiness was *appointed* the Son of God.

The KJV has: and *declared* to be the Son of God. That, I believe, is a better translation. The Greek word here is *horizó*, and meant 'determined'. So, an ancient reading of this verse might be something like: By his resurrection from the dead it was determined (or it was proven) that he was the Son of God.

Certainly we find more definitive statements about the pre-existence of Jesus in other letters of Paul.

Philippians 2:7 – he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

What verse four does is to refute another controversy – Jesus was fully human and fully divine. That is a mystery of faith. However, in opposition of the adoptionist Christology called Docetism – which believed that Jesus only appeared to be human, but was not.

Verse four refutes that claim, as well.

1:5 – Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith/to the faith for his name’s sake.

Paul will be completely clear in this letter what this verse does not mean. Paul had not been sent by Jesus to get people to obey the law of Moses. He has been sent to bring about obedience to faith in Jesus.

Jesus said this about Paul’s ministry when he sent Ananias to Paul:

Acts 9:15 – “But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

1:6 – And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

This ends Paul’s greeting, and verses 6 & 7 contain two powerful calling that you and I share with those Christians in Rome long ago.

First – we are called to belong to God. The KJV has simply – called of Jesus Christ. That’s actually a good translation from the Greek. But the word we translate as called literally means to be summonsed.

We must see Jesus as more than Savior. Jesus is Lord and Savior. Once salvation comes, we are then summonsed into service to our Lord.

Verse seven says that we are called/summonsed to be his (Jesus') holy people. The word we translate as holy meant sacred and sacred meant to be set apart for God's use. Sometimes this word is translated as saints.

The meaning in the Greek is clear. When we accept Jesus as our Savior – then Lord – we then are summonsed to be God's. To be set aside for God's use.

This is your calling. Not just the calling for preachers and evangelists, but the calling of each and every Christian.

Then in verse seven Paul writes: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and Peace was Paul's customary phrase.

Grace refers to the unmerited favor of God. The peace that we receive is the result of that Grace – we have peace because we are reconciled with God. No longer do we live in fear, we live with and in peace.

After his greeting, he gives a customary thanksgiving. The only letter we have from Paul without this thanksgiving is --- Galatians.

1:8 – First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Paul thanks God through Jesus Christ. As our mediator between us and God, Paul always approaches God through Jesus. This way of looking at Jesus – our mediator – is referred to as our high priest by the writer of the Book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:14 – therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,^[1] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Also in verse eight, Paul refers to the great faith of the church in Rome. Faith will be dealt with a great deal in this letter.

1:9 – God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel/good news of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Paul writes – how I constantly remember you in my prayers. Paul admonishes the Christians in Thessalonica to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). The word in both verses is without remission. We might translate this as regularly and continually.

Verse ten shows that whatever Paul does to advance the good news, he does according to God's will.

1:11 – I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Paul longs to see them so that he may impart some spiritual gift. Remember from our study of 1 Corinthians ...

1 Corinthians 12:7 – Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

This should be our longing for the church – the body of Christ. Our longing should not just be to gather together for worship or study – but that each of us can impart something from the manifestation of the Spirit that has been given to each of us.

In verse twelve Paul says that his longing is that through these spiritual gifts, that they would be encouraged by each others faith.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 – encourage one another and build each other up.

1:13 – I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,^[d] that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Paul had been prevented from going to Rome by God – Paul had work to do in the provinces where he established churches. God’s timing is always the right time.

Paul wants to reap a harvest among them and the rest of the Gentiles. A harvest is a metaphor that Paul often uses to describe leading people to Christ.

Galatians 6:7 – Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Of course, Jesus said several times in the gospels that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Laboring for the harvest is Paul’s life purpose, as he now makes clear.

1:14 – I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel/good news also to you who are in Rome.

I’m reading from the NIV. The KJV & RSV have Greeks and barbarians. The Greek word was barbaros which meant someone who did not speak Greek or Latin. Basically, we would use the word foreigner.

However, Greeks looked down at foreigners, barbarians. Paul, as a Christian, took no such view of humanity. All, he knew, were in need of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Because Rome was such a collection of cultures from all around Europe, Asia, and Africa, and because he was obligated to preach to foreigners, he would naturally have been eager to go to Rome.

Now Paul transitions into the theme of his letter – the Good News of Jesus Christ. As I have taught and preached, the word that we translate as gospel should be translated as good news.

The word good news – euaggelion – is used about eighty times in the New Testament. Sixty of those times are in Paul’s letters. He uses it so much, that many scholars believe that it was Paul who coined the word for Christian usage.

Perhaps. Paul was the New Testament author most driven by the law, so the message of salvation through Jesus Christ – once he got over the complete change in world view – would have been the most shocking and transformational for Paul.

1:16 – 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.

Paul calls the good news the power of God. It is the dunamis – the dynamite – the power of God! Dunamis is the Greek word used to describe miracles. Salvation it self, according to this verse, is a miracle.

Have you received salvation?
Then you have received a miracle!

The Greek word that we translate as salvation could be used in a number of ways: welfare, prosperity, deliverance, preservation, salvation, safety.

Paul will spend a great deal of this letter explaining exactly what salvation meant to him, and what it should mean to us.

Paul wrote that this salvation came first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. It wasn’t that Paul felt that the Jews were more deserving than the Gentiles. Quite the contrary. He believed that the Jews had a responsibility.

A responsibility to be bearers of the good news, for salvation came through the Jews.

We translate a word as believes in verse 16. This is the verbal form of the word faith – pistis, that I preached on for several weeks recently. Paul will use this word many times in this letter.

For Paul, as we will see in this letter, faith is a condition of perfect trust in God’s mercy, God’s grace.

1:17 – For in the gospel/good news the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,^[e] just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”^[f]

Paul makes it clear, God declares us to be righteous because of our faith. The NIV has by faith from first to last. Some translations have by faith to faith. Either way it is interpreted, the meaning is that it is faith and only faith – there is no other way to be declared righteous.

As this letter will make abundantly clear, we cannot be declared righteous before God by following the law.

Philippians 3:8 – What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in^[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

In verse 17, “The righteous will live by faith.” is a quote Habakkuk 2:4.

This righteousness by faith and not by works is what makes the good news good news!

The rest of this chapter will describe humanity’s fall as a downward progression. It starts with rejecting God as creator, refusing to see what can be known about God by what God has made.

We continue this downward progression by refusing to give thanks to God as our provider. We even worship creation and not the creator. God then expresses God’s wrath by giving us what we want and therefore we are left to suffer the consequences.

1:18 – The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

The wrath of God is not expressed as an emotion of anger as we would express wrath, but instead as allowing us to be trapped in our sinfulness.

Humans use our lack of righteousness (sinfulness) to hold back the truth about God. Unrighteous people (which includes all of us by nature) don't want to know what is true about God. Truth is available to all, however, but the deeper into sin we spiral the more we don't want to believe the truth.

1:20 – For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Verse 19 tells us that God has made some things of God's existence plain to humanity. The unrighteous try to suppress this truth.

Here in verse twenty, Paul states that humans can know at least some things about God by looking at creation. When we look at creation – and we know so much more about creation than those ancient people – we can arrive at some conclusions about God.

This was not some new biblical perspective. The psalmist wrote in ...

Psalm 19:1 – The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;

night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;

no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world.

1:21 – For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Rejecting God as creator leads to a refusal to honor and give thanks to God. Why would someone honor a God who did not create them? Why give thanks to God if we believe that what we have we have developed and acquired?

That is why the Bible begins with creation. Forget the arguments as to the particulars of creation (after all, there are two creation stories in the Bible), if we don't begin with the belief that God is our creator, we won't get far in our faith journey.

When we begin with false assumptions, it guarantees false conclusions.

And when we dismiss God, we think of ourselves as the wisdom that the world has, which Paul refers to in here in verse 22. "They claimed to be wise, but became fools."

This is the downward spiral that Paul is laying out here in chapter one. The next step in this downward spiral of unrighteousness is there in verse 23 – we worship creation instead of the creator.

Now, things get darker for humanity. Paul is actually describing the life of the pagans of that time. Some had become Christian, and those to whom he was writing would have clearly understood what he was writing about because they had lived it.

1:24 – Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Some people have questions about this verse that says that God gave them over in their sinful desires. This is the wrath of God being carried out in our lifetime.

Remember **1:18** – The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness.

The wrath of God is not expressed as an emotion of anger as we would express wrath, but instead as allowing us to be trapped in our sinfulness.

This may not sound like much of a punishment at first, but consider the amount of human misery resulting from unchecked sin – whether sexual sin or not. In fact, greed should rank right up there with sexual sin as to the costs to humanity.

1:26 – Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Humanity's downward spiral into unrighteousness will very often manifest itself sexually.

These verses and others here in Romans 1 are debated by many. For example, Paul writes "their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones." The argument is we don't know what Paul called natural and unnatural so how can we judge.

Well, we do know what Paul would have called natural and unnatural. He would have, as a devout Jew, called heterosexual relationships natural.

In verse 27 we read that 'men ... , received in themselves the due penalty for their error.' It's debated as to what that means. What is clear is that even though God has given humanity up to these desires, God still holds us responsible for our actions.

As normalized as various sexual practices are in our day, they were even more so in Paul's day. Various sexual practices were even built into the worship of various pagan gods and idols. But note, Paul is not writing any of this to condemn sinners as lost – otherwise we would all be lost!

He is writing about the downward spiral of unrighteousness to emphasize the good of the good news!

All sinners can be forgiven and redeemed through faith in Christ, no matter what our sinful choices have been.

1 Corinthians 6:9 – Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men^[a] ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1:28 – Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

Again, we have God giving them over to their sinful behaviors. God actually allows humanity to express their sin unchecked. This is God's wrath. It is wrath because humanity then must experience the painful consequences of our choices.

In the previous verses Paul focused on sexual sins, but they are in no way the only sins with painful consequences, as we are about to read.

1:29 (NIV) – They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice.

Please note, Paul doesn't single out sexual sin and then change the subject.

Wickedness – This word can be translated – and should be – as injustice.

Evil – inequity. This would have been Paul's poke at the economic situation of the Roman world, of which there was very little equity. Far more so than today.

The KJV has this translated as fornication. The NKJV has sexual immorality. I'm not sure why. It is clearly inequity.

Greed – Exactly what it means, and greed and inequity go hand and hand. Some translations use covetousness

Depravity – often translated as malice or hatred. The Greek can also mean spiteful.

Envy – can also be spiteful, or one who holds a grudge.

Notice that Paul is listing a whole host of behaviors. Many Christians like to only point out the sexual sins that Paul writes about, but clearly an unrighteous life leads to many un Christlike behaviors.

Murder and strife – The Greek word for strife means contention in relationships.

Deceit – can mean treachery or even craftiness. Cheating or dishonesty.

Malice or evil mindedness – Evil mindedness is a good translation.

1:29b – They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

Gossips – Thank you Paul! Perhaps one of the biggest sins within the Church. Many Christians even disguise gossip as a prayer concern. But gossip is listed right here with the behaviors of those who reject God.

That is what sin is for all of us, even Christians – rejecting God.

Slanderers – Closely related to gossip.

God haters, insolent – Insolent often translated as violent. The word was often associated with temper.

Arrogant and boastful – Arrogant is often translated as proud or haughty. It literally means putting people below you. Yes! Feeling superior is as bad as any sexual sin we can point out.

1:31 – they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

No love – can be translated as heartless.

No mercy – can be translated as no pity.

1:32 – Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Next week when we begin chapter 2 – Paul seems to be saying ‘all of these sinful things are who we are apart from God.’”

It’s not that any one of us do all of these things. It is, however, the same root of sin rules in our hearts, and when we reject God the sin within us will express itself in some way.

Last week we began an in depth look into Paul’s letter to the Church in Rome. We got through chapter one. In that chapter, Paul described our fall into sin as a downward progression.

It starts with rejecting God as creator, refusing to see what can be known about God by what God has made.

We continue this downward progression by refusing to give thanks to God as our provider. We even worship creation and not the creator. God then expresses God’s wrath by giving us what we want and therefore we are left to suffer the consequences.

Here in chapter 2, Paul sort of springs a trap on all of those who thought Paul’s list of sins in Romans 1 was about other people. In truth, Paul will go on to say, everyone is guilty of sin.

Those who judge others are also guilty – guilty of hypocrisy.

Romans 2:1 – 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.

The more self-righteous among Paul’s readers then, and now, may protest somewhat over this verse and claim that they do not do the things that Paul wrote about in chapter 1. However, Paul will show in this chapter that even the most religious will be judged for their sinful choices.

2:2 – Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³So 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?

What if we pass judgment but don’t do the same things? Can we pass judgement on the sins we don’t commit?

Remember what I said last week. The root of all sin is the same. Sin is a rejection of God which then separates us from God.

Maybe we don’t commit the same sins as that person over there, but the sins we do commit are the same in that like any other sinner, we reject God and become separated from God.

2:4 – 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?

This is an important verse – God’s kindness is intended to lead us to repentance. In modern English one might say – do not mistake my kindness for weakness. The same is true with God.

God’s mercy is not a sign of indifference or weakness. It is meant to inspire thankfulness, faith and repentance.

God’s mercy is not meant to say that our sin is not important to God.

2:5 – But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

In chapter one, Paul wrote about how God’s wrath was being shown right here and now in the lives of the unrighteous. Remember – God handed them over to their sinful desires. In that way, God’s wrath was being displayed through their suffering of the consequences of their sin.

Here, Paul is talking about a more final judgment, at the end of days. It’s very important to follow Paul’s thoughts in this book, and not to take too much out of its context because

he is leading up to showing us in chapter three that there is a way to be saved from God's wrath.

2:6 – God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

Taken out of context this can be a troubling statement, but again, you've got to stay with Paul. Yes, we are judged according to what we have done – and as we shall see, if what we have done is put our faith in Jesus our Savior, then we will be judged accordingly.

The quote is from Psalm 62 and proverbs 24.

2:7 – To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Again, do not take this out of context. Paul is building to a point. That point being – no person can lead a perfect life. We don't have it within us to persistently do good.

2:8 – But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Paul is building his case that none of us can hope to stand before God on our own merits and receive anything but the judgment we have earned with our sinfulness.

We need another way to be saved. Be patient, he will get there.

Last week I pointed out that the Greeks looked down upon anyone who did not speak their language

Remember Romans **1:14** – I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

Remember, the word we translate in the NIV as non Greeks was barbarians. We would call them foreigners. Greeks didn't like foreigners. Many good Christians don't like foreigners.

Paul's worldview was that he had an obligation for the locals and the foreigners.

In light of that, we come to ...

2:11 – For God does not show favoritism.

This may not have set well with some people. It is, however, true. This is another reason why the good news is good – it is possible for anyone and everyone to receive salvation through faith.

The rest of chapter two describes two groups of people. In this section, Gentiles are those who sin apart from the law, and Jews are those who sin under the law.

Paul will show how, with both groups, God will judge people based on whether they kept the law and were circumcised in their hearts.

2:12 – All who sin apart from the law (Gentiles) will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law (Jews) will be judged by the law.

Notice that in both categories – those apart from the law and those under the law – both categories contain 'who have sinned'. There is no 'who have not sinned'.

Sinners without the law to follow (Gentiles) will die and be judged by God without the law, because their sin is still sin.

Sinners under the law – the Jews – will be judged by God according to the law of Moses when they die.

Each group of people is held to the standards of their own knowledge. The point that Paul is moving towards – All have sinned and are guilty.

2:13 – For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Simply hearing the law does not save anyone. In order to be declared righteous in God’s eyes, a person under the law would have to obey the law perfectly.

This passage parallels the message of the book of Hebrews 10:1-10, which states that the old covenant was never meant to save anyone. It was made to teach us and prepare us for a Savior.

Hebrews 10:1 – The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

2:14 – (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

In verse 14, Paul recognizes that some non Jewish people end up keeping parts of the law by nature. In other words, the human conscience sometimes prompts people to do the right thing even without having a written law to make them do it.

The ties into Paul’s earlier comments in chapter one that God makes certain things obvious to people.

Paul is not suggesting that the non Jews (Gentiles) who live by a good conscience will be declared righteous by God, only that such a person is following some kind of minimum standard for right and wrong.

2:16 – This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my *gospel*/good news declares.

At the judgment, our conscience will stand as a witness in regards to what we have done, right or wrong. In other words, God will judge the Gentiles who are not under the law fairly even as he judges the Jews who are under the law fairly.

This verse states that God will judge our secret thoughts. You see, it's not just actions or inactions that can be sinful, but even our thoughts.

Matthew 5:27 – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Please remember the larger point of all of this that Paul is working towards: nobody – Jew or Gentile – will be shown to be righteous based on their own good works. Only in Christ and through faith.

Paul now launches into a series of If/then statements – something Paul does often in his letters.

2:17 – Now you, **if** you call yourself a Jew; **if** you rely on the law and boast in God;

Paul is not referring to selfish bragging when he writes about boasting in God. The Jewish people – and therefore you and I, could and we can rightly boast that the one true God was their God – is our God. And they were and we are God's people.

The only glory we possess is found in belonging to God, who is all glorious.

2:18 – **if** you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;

This word that is translated as superior, or excellent – it is the Greek word (dee-af-er'-o) which literally means that which makes a difference.

2:19 – **if** you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you, **then**, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?

Paul has asked a series of leading ‘if’ questions. Now he begins asking why it is not followed? As the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 10 – you keep having to make

the same sacrifices over and over again. Why? Because you keep sinning over and over again.

2:22 – You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Paul’s point is that the Jewish people were themselves breaking the law in various ways. Likewise, if we are honest with ourselves, and we should be, we all fall short of the glory of God – which is a quote from Romans.

Paul recognizes that many Jews believed that having the law was enough to make them righteous in God’s eyes. Having the law is not enough if you don’t perfectly keep the law.

In verse 24, Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:5 to make the point that those under the law dishonor God when they break the law.

2:25 – Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.

For men, circumcision was a sign that they belonged to the Jewish nation. Paul is saying that the only real membership is found in keeping all of the law. If you keep one – circumcision – but break others, then what good is the one law you have kept?

Now, we can say – hey I don’t murder, I don’t steal. So, if I gossip a little, I’m not doing the really bad stuff.

The point Paul is making, and will continue to make, is found in:

Romans 3:22 – There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

2:26 – So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? ²⁷ The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the^[c] written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

Paul is offering up a hypothetical argument here to show the futility of the law. If an uncircumcised Gentile were to keep all of the law, then they would fulfill the requirements that the Jews believed saved the Jews.

Paul is not saying that a Gentile can be saved by the law, just showing the futility of the law.

2:28 – A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹No, 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.

Paul is saying that Jewishness – and for Paul that meant to be under God's covenant – true Jewishness is not about being born Jewish or being physically circumcised.

What counts is the state of a person's heart. Paul mentions circumcision of the heart – a changed heart.

Jeremiah 4:4 – Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
circumcise your hearts,
you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,

Jeremiah 9:25 – “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh— ²⁶Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places.^[e] For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”

Look at 2:29 again – Such a person's *praise* is not from other people, but from God.

Paul is using word play here. The Hebrew word praise can mean Judah, or Jew. So verse 29 can be interpreted as: Such a person's Jewishness is not from other people, but from God.

Chapter 3

In verses 1-8, Paul uses a challenge/response structure that clarifies that being Jewish and circumcised still has advantages. Also, that God remains faithful even when we are unfaithful.

3:1 – What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ² Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

The Old and New Testaments were written by Jews, or Jews who became a Christ follower (with the possible exception of Luke/Acts).

3:3 – What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴ 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."

In verse 4, Paul loosely quotes from 116:11, and follows it up with a quote from Psalm 51:4.

His point is that God's faithfulness does not depend on human faithfulness – thanks be to God! God will always keep God's word no matter what we do.

God keeps God's side of the covenant.

3:5 – 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.) ⁶ Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

In other words, is God unfair to judge human sin?
No, God is righteous and therefore he is rightfully the judge.

3:7 – Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" ⁸ Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

Paul finally gets to the heart of the reason for his question and answer format he had been using. He seems to be answering some slanderous accusations against him.

These accusation came about because Paul taught that human sinfulness demonstrates God's righteousness, and that God remains faithful even when we aren't. In fact, some believed that once you accepted Jesus as their savior, they could live any way they wanted.

Sure glad there aren't Christians like that anymore!

3:9 – 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.

Earlier in this chapter Paul said that the Jews did have an advantage in that the word was given through them. Now, as it pertains to sin, the answer is that there is no advantage at all.

In the following verses, Paul quotes from several Old Testament scriptures to show that every human being ought to be judged unrighteous before God because of sin.

3:10 – As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”

While the thought here can be found in several places in the Old Testament, Paul is quoting from Psalm 14:1-3.

3:13 – “Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”

Psalm 5:9.

3:13b – “The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

Psalm 140:3.

3:14 – “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

Psalm 10:7.

3:15 – “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know.”

Isaiah 59:7-8.

3:18 – “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Psalm 36:1.

3:19 – 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. ²⁰ 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.

Paul is summing up his case that the law cannot protect anyone from the judgement of God due to their sinfulness.

Indeed, all the law can do for us is make us aware of our sinfulness.

Beginning now in verse 21, we have a section of this letter that pertains to justification by faith. This section will run through chapter four.

3:21 – But now ...

Let's pause for a moment right here. We read 'but now' and we just causally move along. This is the most important 'but now' you will ever read in your entire life!

Paul has just written that no human can be justified by the works of the law. Nobody can keep the law perfectly, and nobody lives a life worthy of God's righteousness. Things sound mighty bad for us sinful humans! What hope do any of us have?

Now, with that in mind, let us continue.

3:21 – But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

How has the righteousness of God become known? Through the Good News of Jesus Christ, of course! & the prophets testified to this! Well, I'm giving away what Paul says in the next verse.

3:22 – This righteousness is given through faith in/through Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Here is the point Paul has been working towards every since he wrote about all types of sin in chapter one. Sadly, many Christians think chapter one was just about sexual sin, but no – all people have sinned and all people have fallen short of God's glory.

So, is there any hope? How can we ever stand before God at this judgment that Paul has written about?

3:24 – and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

I wonder if Paul ever sat back and said to himself – wow that’s some good stuff right there!

Justified freely. Made right at no cost to ourselves! This is by grace.

Through redemption – (ap-ol-oo'-tro-sis) – ransom. Sin had us in it’s grip & Jesus ransomed us to get us back!

3:25 – God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,^[1] through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

Atonement – literally means propitiatory or expiation. Both big words that mean the acts of making amends for something that was wrong.

Don’t overlook faith. Paul will have much to say about faith.

3:25b – He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ 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.

Notice verse 25b – sins committed before Jesus haven’t gone unpunished. In fact, Jesus died for those sins, as well.

1 Peter 3:19 – After being made alive,^[d] he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago

3:27 – Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith.

When Paul asks where is our boasting, he is referring to the pride that comes with religious rule following. We might call it moral superiority. Paul says that is pointless – in fact he has spent the entirety of the book up to now explaining why that is pointless.

Our boasting is in Christ alone.

3:28 – For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

This is a very significant verse! Thanks be to God that our justification – our being made right – has nothing to do with keeping the law. If it did, we'd be lost.

Note that Paul does not say to abandon the law. But we are not to boast in it. We are to know that our salvation does not come through it, but through Jesus our Savior.

3:29 – Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Does Paul mean that the law is still in effect?
Well, come back next week. In chapter four Paul will explain what he means.

Romans

Chapter 4

Last week we finished Romans chapter 3. Paul spent chapters 1-3 describing humanity's downward spiral into sin. He showed how no one – Jew or Gentile – can be saved by obeying the law.

Here in verses 1-12 of chapter four, Paul focuses on the faith of Abraham to further his argument that God only declares people righteous based on their faith.

He brings in king David, as well, to show that God will forgive sins and call sinners blessed.

4:1 – What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ²If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Paul is making the point that no one has ever been justified – made right – with God by following the works of the law.

He points to Abraham as a great example. Using Genesis 15:6, he shows that it was Abraham's faith in God which allowed to him to be justified before God.

Paul made this same argument and used this same quote in Galatians 3:6.

4:4 – Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Salvation is a gift. If there is anything that we have to do to earn salvation, then it is no longer a gift. Gift's are free. Wages are earned.

4:6 – David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those

whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

⁸Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

David wrote these words in Psalm 32:1-2.

The one whose sin is forgiven is blessed.

Let's consider the biblical word blessed. It has nothing to do with what we earn or what we have acquired.

We buy a new car or something nice and say how blessed we are. That's not a blessing. That's good fortune, or hard work (or going into debt).

To be blessed in the biblical sense is to receive something freely, a gift.

4:9 – 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. ¹⁰Under what

circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ 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.

Paul is saying that the reason there was a gap of time between Abraham being credited as righteous and his circumcision was so that Abraham would become the father to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

All non Jewish people can follow Abrahams example of being declared righteous before God because of faith, and not because of works.

And the next verse shows that Abraham became the father of all Jews, as well.

4:12 – 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.

So circumcision would mean nothing without faith.

4:13 – 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.

What does Paul mean by an heir to the world?

It appears that Paul was referring to the promise that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1 – The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

²“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]

³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.

4:14 – For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Paul has already shown that nobody can keep the whole law. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:10, 23). If God promised salvation through the law, and nobody can keep the law, then the promise is worthless.

Don't let verse 15 confuse you. Paul is not saying that those not under the law have never sinned. He has already stated that all have sinned.

He is saying that those who are not under the law have not broken the law. They have fallen short of God's glory.

4:16 – 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.¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."^[c] 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.

Paul quotes from Genesis 17:5 – I have made you the father of many nations.

The word we translate as nations is *ethnos* – and we get the word *ethnic* from that word. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many diverse ethnic groups, not just Semitic people, and certainly not just the Jewish people.

As Paul says in verse 17 – Abraham is our father in the sight of God, even if we aren't descended from him.

4:18 – 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." (Genesis 15:5)¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,²¹ being fully persuaded that God had

power to do what he had promised.²² This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This passage makes it clear, especially so in verse 24, that salvation is offered to those who believe, not by any other means.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Paul explains what it is we are to believe in – verse 24 – God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Verse 25 – He was delivered over to death for our sins – In other words, Jesus died in our place on the cross. He received the penalty of our sin.

Verse 25b – and was raised to life for our justification.

This word – justification – can mean acquittal. We have been acquitted of the charge of sin.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 begins a lengthy section of Romans that describes the new life that justification brings. This section will run through chapter 8.

Some claim that this section is the most important part of all of Paul’s writings. It is, to be sure, extremely important. However, it would be difficult to place any one part of Paul’s writings over another.

But, this section will probably take us a good deal of time to study, because almost every verses is a study in and of itself.

5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

First off, keep in mind that Paul is writing to Christians. The ‘we’ in this verse, as some would like to view, is not universal. Paul has already in chapter four outlined that salvation – or justification – comes through belief in the one who raised Jesus from the dead.

Also note, and this is significant, that the event of being justified is in the past tense. We aren’t being justified, we have already been justified. For the believer, that transaction is complete.

Don’t live in fear that because you messed up that God is going to change God’s mind about you. Repent, and move forward because you have already been justified. That is why, as Paul says – we have peace now in the present.

5:1b – we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Verse two makes it clear – once again – that this peace comes about by faith.

The word grace is the Greek word χάρις (charis) which means a gift or a favor. Grace is something we did not earn. In fact, by definition, grace cannot be earned.

Because of our faith in Jesus, we have received a gift we did not deserve – justification, being made right with God, and then peace which comes from being right with God.

Paul says that we boast in the hope of the glory of God. I preached about that word hope not long ago. The Greek word – elpece – means an expectation. We boast in our expectation of God’s glory.

As Paul says elsewhere several times in his letters – we aren’t boasting about what we have done, but about what God has done for us.

5:3 – Not only so, but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Suffering? Come on, Paul! Don’t all our troubles just melt away when we put our faith in Jesus? Absolutely not!

John 16:33 – “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

The word we translate as sufferings can mean our daily troubles we all face, and it can also mean persecution. Many of these Christians in Rome were pagan converts. As such, many would have been looked down upon by their families at the very least, and some would have been all together excluded from their friends and families.

So, this verse about suffering was very real to the folks in Rome.

What do we suffer for Jesus? Really?

James starts his letter with the same thought:

James 1:2 – Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Paul & James both understand – as should we – that rejoicing is a choice that we make to declare that no matter what we are facing in life, God is good.

Verse four – perseverance, (produces) character; and character, (produces) hope.

This tells us that when we make the decision to rejoice it will grow our character. Christian character. The characteristics of Christ will be displayed through us.

When we choose to rejoice, we will be depending upon God more, and ourselves less. The more we trust God, the more Christ like character is revealed in us.

And this character will produce another quality within us – hope. Remember, biblical hope is an expectation. When we make a decision to rejoice about the goodness of God, regardless of what is happening in the world or in our lives, it will produce a greater expectation in the promises of God.

5:5 – And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

When Paul says that our hope does not put us to shame he is saying that our hope – our expectation – will come to fruition. We will never be disappointed for expecting to receive God’s goodness for eternity.

How can we be confident in this – the very love of God has been given to us through the Holy Spirit. It is in our hearts. Yes, there is an emotional aspect to our faith. It’s not based on emotion, but it produces emotions.

5:6 – You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Christ died for the ungodly. Quoting from the Psalms, Paul wrote in chapter **3:10** – As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one.”

And in 3:23 – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

He writes that this happened while we were still powerless, or helpless. The Greek word implies someone who was feeble or sickly. It was sin sickness, from which there is no recovery except Jesus Christ.

Paul often mentions ‘his gospel’, or his good news. Verse six is the good in the good news! Romans 5:6 is a verse to remember and to celebrate!

5:7 – Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God in the flesh died for the ungodly who deserved judgment for their sins. Why would God do such a thing? To demonstrate God’s love for us.

When Paul writes that Christ died for us, he means that Christ died in our place. Jesus took our judgment upon himself, and took our punishment on the cross.

God proved God’s love for us. That makes God worth trusting.

5:9 – Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

We are now justified – literally we have been shown to be righteous.

Those who have been shown to be righteous will never suffer God’s wrath for their sin.

5:10 – For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Focusing on our personal relationship with God, Paul tells us that Christ’ death for us and in our place allows for us to enter into a very real and personal relationship with God.

We had been – by virtue of our sin – enemies of God. Now we are God’s beloved.

And Paul says that since we are reconciled with God, how much more is it true that we will be saved – literally rescued – by the life of Christ. Paul is specifically referring to Jesus’ resurrected life.

The death of Jesus for our sins would mean nothing if Jesus had not risen.

1 Corinthians 15:14 – if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

5:11 – Not only is this so, but we also **boast/rejoice** in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Verse eleven sums up the passage that began in verse 1 of chapter five. The word boast can also be translated as rejoice. The word means to speak or shout something with pride and joy.

This verse says because of all that he has written in verses 1-10 gives us something to talk about, and talk about joyfully. You ever feeling as if you’re having a bad day? Read Romans 5:1-10 & you will have something to be joyful about. And, then, instead of talking about your troubles, you will have something to talk about that will give you joy!

Please note that this verse is in the past tense. This reconciliation for you – Christian – has already taken place. We are already standing in God’s grace according to verse 2. God has already poured out God’s love into our hearts according to verse 5.

It’s already done! Rejoice!

The rest of this chapter compares the work of Adam with the work of Christ. This is to show how sin and death came into the world, and how God made a way for us to escape them.

These verses further explain the idea of human sin, Christ’s sacrifice, and our salvation, all of which Paul has spoken of in this letter so far.

5:12 – Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

Though he is not mentioned by name for several verses, Paul starts with Adam. While some interpret this literally or allegorically – one thing we can be certain of – death follows sin.

5:13 – To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law.

As Paul often does, he gives a side note in verse 13-14. He will pick up his main point in verse 15.

Here he picks up a question that some may have had – how could there be sin before Moses gave the law?

Remember **4:15** – where there is no law there is no transgression.

Well now he wants to clarify that verse. IN the context of chapter four, Paul wasn’t saying that there had been no actual sin before the law, only that would could not literally break a law if there was no law.

Paul says here in verse 13 that specific sins were not counted against specific people before the law. It was not a transgression in the sense of breaking God’s commands.

It was, however, sinful humanity expressing its sinful nature.

5:14 – Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

Even without a specific command, people sinned. They lied, cheated, stole, and committed all the other sins we are familiar with.

Even without a specific command from God, they suffered the consequence of sin – death. Or as Paul puts it – death reigned.

What does Paul mean by Adam was a pattern or type of the one to come?
Paul explains in the following verses.

5:15 – But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Paul explains that Adam and Jesus were alike in that their choices affected many people. One single action by Adam brought death to all who came after him.

Jesus’ choice – the free gift – brings salvation from death.
Adam’s choice brought death to many. Jesus’ choice brings the grace of God to many.

Paul continues to write about the difference between the gift and the trespass in the following verses.

5:16 – Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

By sinning, Adam brought death and condemnation to all. Jesus, by not sinning and dying in our place, brought justification to all who believe.

The word we translate as justification was often used in the Greek to describe an action by the courts.

5:17 – For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

In verse 14, Paul said that because of Adam’s sin, death reigned. Here in verse 17, Paul tells us that through the abundant provision of God’s grace, righteousness reigns in the lives of those who believe.

In this time of plurality amongst many believers in Jesus, please note what Paul also says in this verse. This freedom from death to life is available through the one man, Jesus Christ.

5:18 – Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

For those who would take a verse out of context, the claim has been made that this verse states that all people no matter what have been justified by Jesus’ act of atonement. This is known as universalism.

We can’t stand on universalism, however, if we read much more of Paul’s letters, and certainly not if we read much more of Romans.

5:19 – For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Disobedience brings sin and death.
Obedience brings life.

5:20 – The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

Some question – the law was brought in so that trespass might increase? That sounds mean spirited.

It wasn't that people necessarily started sinning more, but that our sin became recognized as rebellion against God. Before God gave the law, many people had no idea how much God hated sin. After the law, it became apparent to all who loved God just how bad sin truly was/is.

But, grace increased. Yes! God gives good to us when we deserve bad. In the next chapter, Paul will write about a common abuse of this idea: the claim that sin is actually good, since it provides God more opportunity to show grace.

5:20 – The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

5:21 – so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin cannot grow past God's capacity to give good. Sin reigns, but grace reigns supreme!

That, my friends, is good stuff! It's good news!

Romans

Chapter 6

Last week we finished chapter 5. Remember that Chapter 5 – 8 is a long section that describes the new life that justification brings.

Here in Chapter six, verses 1-14 explores how Christians should think about and respond to sin now that we are justified. Paul introduces a new thought about our dying with Christ in a spiritual sense.

6:1 – What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Paul responds to the question in verse one with a question – how can we live in it (sin) any longer. But it is his statement before this question that introduces this new thought – We are those who have died to sin.

6:3 – Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Part of dying to sin includes being baptized into his death. It appears that Paul is speaking about a baptism of the Holy Spirit and not a water baptism – although many use this verse to refer to water baptism.

It takes more than water to die to sin, it takes the Holy Spirit. As Paul states in 1 Cor 12:13 – by the Spirit we become baptized into Christ's body.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – For we were all baptized by^[e] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit.

I, nor Paul, is discrediting water baptism. Water baptism is an outward sign – an expression – of the Spirit's baptism.

So, in verse three, Paul is saying that when someone trusts in Jesus for justification – salvation – that person receives the Holy Spirit and is baptized into Jesus' death. We die with him. We die to the world with Christ.

6:4 – 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.

When we trust in Jesus for justification, a very real spiritual transaction takes place. On a spiritual level – just as God raised Jesus from the dead, God raises us from a spiritual death (which is a life ruled by sin).

While this is a mystery, it is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. This spiritual transaction takes place in different ways and at different times for different people.

For some, it happens long before baptism. For others, long after baptism. Some confess with their mouths but it takes a while before it is a heartfelt confession.

The important thing – stay on the journey!

6:5 – For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Some look to this verse to say that we will have a physical body after we die. I don't believe that is what Paul has in mind when he says that we will be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians ...

1 Corinthians 15:42 – So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I believe that in Romans 6:5, Paul is referring to everlasting life in the presence of God. We – the soul – the spirit – will not merely lay in the grave and decay with the body.

6:6 – For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,^[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Paul adds something to help us understand what exactly happens when we died spiritually with Christ. Our old self becomes crucified. The old self is the sinful self that relied on ourselves.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God puts the old self to death.

Does that mean that we never want to sin again? Don't we wish! Paul will show that the 'want' still remains. However, we are no longer slaves to sin.

While we are no longer held captive by sin, there are several places in the New Testament that speak of sin remaining.

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Verse seven states that we that we have been set free from sin. Set free from its power.

6:8 – Now if/since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Paul has written about this spiritual dying to the world. When that happened we were spiritually resurrected with Jesus.

If/since we have done that, we will receive receive a new life in the here and now. This resurrection life begins here and now. It is the new life.

Ephesians 2:4 – But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ

So, is Paul here in Romans 6:8 speaking of life after death or life here and now? Yes! Life after death begins here and now. It won't ever stop.

6:9 – For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

The death Jesus died he died for sin – but not for his sin for he did not have sin. The death he died he died for our sin. His death was once and for all.

Hebrews 9:26 – Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

6:11 – In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Those who trust in Jesus for salvation must change the way that they think of themselves. We are dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ.

That means that we have been set free from the power of sin. It also means that the life we live we – being alive to God in Christ – we live for God. We live for righteousness. Paul will say this later in this letter.

6:12 – Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ 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.

Yes, we have been set free from the power of sin, but we have not lost our desire to sin. Sometimes we know our actions or thoughts or wrong, but we have a strong desire to do that which we know is wrong.

Here, Paul is saying to keep away from willful sin. We need the Holy Spirit so that we would have self control.

In verse 13 he writes – offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. In **Romans 12:1** he will write – 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.

6:14 – For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Spiritually speaking, we are no longer under the law. Remember earlier Paul said that sin still reigned even outside of the law. However, we are under grace. Because of grace, sin has no power over us.

We should all consider our response to grace. Let us not cheapen the grace of God!

The rest of chapter six deals with a question some Christians had about grace and sin. Unfortunately, many Christians are not familiar with this passage – and it is most important!

As Paul will share, we can – and some do – live a life of voluntary slavery to sin.

6:15 – What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! (me genoito!). ¹⁶ 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?

In this chapter and the next, Paul explores this idea of being a slave. We, by human nature, are slaves to something. God does not make us a slave – but we should recognize that we will be enslaved by something.

We should make a choice – what will we be enslaved to – righteousness or sin?

2 Peter 2:19 – “people are **slaves** to whatever has mastered them.”

6:17 – But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Obedience to teaching is required of each of us. What teaching? Solid Christians teaching. Biblically based teaching.

The earliest description of the church is found in Acts 2. Acts 2:42 tells us that the first Christians devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.

Salvation – following Christ – being a Christian – is not about a transaction that gets completed and then life goes on as usual. This is what Paul wrote – What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! –

If we do not devote ourselves to the teaching of the Bible, we are likely to stay slaves to sin. It takes discipline to be a disciple.

6:18 – You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Remember, we are slaves to whatever masters us. This is voluntary. We must offer ourselves – our bodies and minds – to God, to be used by God for God's righteous purposes.

Do you remember how Paul started this letter?

Romans 1:1 – Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus

Remember the word we translate as servant – it was a bond servant – someone who had sold themselves into slavery.

6:19 – I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

Slavery is certainly a term that causes much emotion and conversation – even arguments – in our modern American context. I am in no way endorsing what was going on in the Bible during Roman times, but slavery was a very different thing.

Over half of the people who lived in the Roman empire either were slaves, or were former slaves. Many of those slaves had sold themselves into slavery. While none of those slaves were free in the sense that we think of free, they were able to live what was in the context of their society a normal life.

This is why Paul writes that he was using an example from everyday life. The he writes about offering themselves as slaves. Many of the people that he was writing to, if not most of them, had offered themselves as slaves to someone.

So, using everyday examples he writes: Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

The offering of themselves as slaves to their earthly master had been voluntary. It was done for their betterment (though we find that hard to believe). Offering yourself up as a slave meant that you would be given a level of protection. You would have a regular wage. You would have food and shelter, and perhaps even medical assistance (as crude as it might have been).

In the same way, we must voluntarily offer ourselves up to God. When we do, we are given protection (from the power of sin). We are offered the Holy Spirit so that we can grow in righteousness.

6:20 – When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

Free from the control of righteousness? Yes, since we had no identity in Christ, we had no mandate to or calling to do what was right. While that was a freedom, he shows us in the next verse that that kind of freedom came with a high cost.

6:21 – What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

What benefit did you reap – in other words – How did that work out for you?! While some may feel that freedom in God means that we are forgiven and then live any way that we want. Paul is showing that living outside of God's righteousness leads to death. In other words, it does not lead to a joyful life in which we are reconciled with God.

6:22 – But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

As a Christian, our identity should be so linked to Jesus that we become changed to people who become holy. Holiness is where we all need to be headed. The fruit of this kind of life is eternal life.

The word translated as holiness in this verse is sometimes translated as sanctification. The thing we must understand about this word, and in particular its usage in this verse, is that it denotes an ongoing process.

Paul – while writing to Christians – uses justification (being made right with God) as something that has already happened. Then he uses sanctification – becoming holy – as an ongoing process.

We don't arrive and say 'hey I'm sanctified.' We can say, however, that 'I am being sanctified.'

6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in^[b] Christ Jesus our Lord.

One of my favorite verses of Scripture! We have here, perhaps, a grand summation of the entire good news of Jesus Christ!

Those without Jesus are slaves to sin, which leads to death. We earn a wage. So sine earns us death.

The other choice is one in which we don't earn anything. In fact we get a gift. The Greek word used here for gift is charisma. While the modern definition of charisma would make us think of a charming person, it's meaning in the ancient world was different.

It literally meant an unmerited favor.

Which life is more appealing? Sin and death, free gift and eternal life?

Chapter 7

In verses 1-6 of chapter 7 Paul teaches about those who are in Christ being released from the law of Moses.

7:1 – 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?

² 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. ³ 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.

Paul is quoting from an ancient Roman saying that they would have been familiar with. It said something to effect that Roman laws only applied to you as long as you were living. It was sort of a tongue in cheek remark, perhaps like we might say that the only that is certain is death and taxes.

Now he will make a spiritual application of that saying as he applies it to the law of Moses.

7:4 – 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.

Now he shares that we have, indeed, died. This frees us from our responsibility to the law – the law of Moses, that is.

Through justification, our old spiritual selves have died. **Remember 6:6** – For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with.

But don't miss the last part of this verse – in order that we might bear fruit. This, now, is our purpose. The following verses speak more of this purpose.

7:5 – For when we were in the realm of the flesh,^[a] the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ 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.

The result of our old spiritual selves dying is not freedom to do whatever we like. Now, we serve in the new way of the Spirit, or as some translations have – the newness of the Spirit.

Christianity is not just about getting a ticket punched to heaven. It is about serving God through the Spirit.

Paul now explains the function of the law – the relationship between sin and the law of Moses.

7:7 – What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

The law is not sinful. The law was God's way of showing humans how sinful we all are. The law shows us what sin is, and reveals our desire to sin.

Paul uses the example of coveting – desiring something or someone else that belongs to another. He continues with this example.

7:8 – But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

There are two ideas at work in this verse. First, humans are rebellious at heart. As soon as we hear about a restriction, we want to break it. The very existence of certain laws provoke something within us that wants to break that law.

The other idea is that God’s law shines a light into our hearts that allows us to discover the existence of sins in our hearts.

Paul writes – apart from the law, sin was dead.

As he has already outlines – sin exists whether the law is known or not, but knowing the law highlights our sin.

7:9 – Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

The law showed Paul that he was a sinner and not a righteous person. This is like a person who enters a doctors office thinking that they are well, but leaves with a diagnosis that they only have a short time to live.

In Paul’s case, and in our fictitious person visiting their doctor, the only thing that had changed was their perspective.

This is why Paul argues that God never intended the law to make us righteous, but to show us how sinful we are.

7:10 – I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

Is Paul contradicting himself here, saying that the law was intended to bring life? I don’t think so. I believe he is looking at the law from the human point of view.

“Hey this is God’s law, so keeping it must make us right with God.”

Well, I suppose that actually is true, but no one can keep it in its entirety.

7:11 – For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

Sin lied to Paul. Sin lies to all of us. Sin convinces us that acting on our own desires is better than obeying God. This began in the very first chapters of the Bible.

The serpent told Eve that God is not right, eat the fruit and you will not die.

The truth, however, is that God is good, and sin always leads to death.

When Paul said that sin out him to death through the law, he is saying that the law made him aware of his separation from God. That is as good as dead.

7:12 – So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

The law reveals to us the very heart of God – the character of God. As such, it is holy. It is good. Paul never once condemns the law.

7:13 – Did that which is good (the law), then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good (the law) to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Paul returns to his central message – our sinfulness is what causes our spiritual death and separation from God, not the law. Sin only takes advantage of the law.

7:14 – We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

The law is spiritual in that it points to our spiritual condition – or as Paul says – the lack of our spiritual condition.

7:15 – I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

Some have understood this to be Paul talking about his life before Jesus, that he describing those under the law.

I don't believe that was the case. I believe, as most do, that Paul is describing his own struggles as a human trapped in a sinful body. We are not slaves to sin any longer – not to the power of sin to bring death. However, we are often divided by our competing desire to do good or to sin.

Verse 16 is saying the very fact that we want to do right instead of wrong is evidence that God's law is beautiful.

7:17 – As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[e] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

Anything good within us is God's spirit. Alone, on our own, we are sinful. This is why the law cannot save us, because we cannot keep it.

7:19 – For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Sometimes we feel weak in our faith journey because we still have a desire to sin within us. Let us know that the Apostle Paul suffered from the same!

Sin still lives in our mortal bodies. It no longer has the power to destroy our soul, but it is there.

7:21 – So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Paul is not describing an inescapable captivity. Some Christians give in to temptation, but we have been given the power through the Holy Spirit to escape. That's

not Paul's point here, only that the temptation to sin is ever present – therefore we could never achieve righteousness through the law.

7:24 – What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!
So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature^[d] a slave to the law of sin.

In verse 24, Paul cried out in frustration over his inability to stop sinning even when he wanted to do good. Then he writes what should for all of us a verse we memorize - Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Only God can give us the power to set aside our desire to sin and to do what is right. Galatians 5 calls this walking by the Spirit. That is – relying on God's power, not our own.

Please note – Paul still calls himself a slave – a bond servant – someone who has sold themselves out to another – a slave to God's law.

Romans

Chapter 8

Verse 1-11 will compare two kinds of life: one in the Holy Spirit, and the other is in the flesh. First, however, he makes a declaration much like he did in chapter 5:1.

8:1 – Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death.

Paul starts with therefore – so remember what we had up to this point, especially chapters 5-7 where he wrote about the relationship between Christians and the law. He also wrote about the righteousness we have is actually Jesus' righteousness.

If we have the righteousness of Christ within us, how could there possibly be condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?

In verse two he writes about the law of the Spirit. The Spirit of God always brings life. The Spirit of life is given to those who put their faith in Jesus.

The Spirit of sin always brings death.

8:3 – For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^[b] God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.^[c] And so he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ 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.

Verse three says that Jesus was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was human, but he had no sin. The writer of **Hebrews 4:15** – For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Verse four tells us that Jesus did this so that the law's requirement of death for sin would be fulfilled.

Paul concluded verse four with a statement he says in one way or another in several letters. As he does in ... **Galatians 5:16** – So I say, walk by the Spirit.

What is walking by the spirit, or as he says here in Romans 8:4 – living in accordance with the Spirit? He expands on this idea in the following verses.

8:5 – 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.⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

This is emphasizing what he wrote in verse 2 – through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death.

But he is also saying more. We are not just set free from sin and death, we are set on another path all together. It's not a path we are placed on to stand still. It is a road that leads to life and peace. As Jesus said in John 10:10 – it is life in abundance, or life to the full.

8:7 – The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God because the mind set on the flesh serves itself above all else. This is the mindset of those who are of the world as he says elsewhere, or as he says here, in the realm of the flesh.

Verse eight says that such a person cannot please God. God is pleased with those who are in Christ because God is pleased with Christ.

God said in **Matthew 17:5** – “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Our identity with Christ makes all of the difference in the world – all of the difference in heaven and hell. Those who are in Christ serve God, those who are in the realm of the flesh serve self.

8:9 – You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if/since indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

In modern English we tend to assume that the word *if* implies doubt. Not so in the ancient world. Quite often I prefer to translate the word if as since in the first part of verse nine.

I think many, many, Christians should think and pray quite heavily on the second part of this verse - if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

I've said it before – you can't be a Christian without the Holy Spirit, and I didn't say it first. Paul said it here, and in other places.

Paul uses “Spirit of God” and Spirit of Christ – these are not two separate spirits. They both refer to the Holy Spirit. Paul had a deeper concept of the trinity than most Christian

have. The Father, Son & Spirit were/are one. The Spirit of God (God being the Father) and the Spirit of Christ are one in the same because Christ and God are one in the same.

8:10 – But if/since Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^[d] because of righteousness.

We are told two things in this verse. First, our bodies are still subject to death, Our human, physical body will die as the result of sin in the world.

But the good news is that the Spirit will give life. That life begins now, but it doesn't end when the mortal body ends. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 that our mortal bodies will put on immortality and our perishable bodies will put on imperishability.

If there were any doubt that Paul meant that we would live on after our physical bodies die, he adds verse 11.

8:11 – And if/since 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^[e] his Spirit who lives in you.

Does this mean that our body in the grave will receive life. Well, don't take this verse out of context. Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 15, and other New Testament writers, make it clear that the body we will have will be different.

1 John 3:2 – Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,^[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

8:12 – Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.

Before describing this obligation, Paul writes about what we are not obligated to. We are no longer obligated to the flesh.

Remember, this Greek word that we translate as flesh (sarx) doesn't mean just our body. It means our human nature – which is self serving, self reliant, me first.

8:13 – 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.

There have always been Christians who worry about sin after they are saved. What if you happen to die before you repent of a sin? Well, if we are living by the Spirit of God – being led by the Spirit of God – the misdeeds of the body (sin) will be put to death.

This is not a license to sin. For if we are led by the Spirit we will be moving forward in mastering our sinful desires. If we are led by the spirit we will not be comfortable with our sin. We will be convicted by the spirit.

8:14 – For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ 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.^[f] And by him we cry, “*Abba*,^[g] Father.”

Romans 8:15 is a wonderful verse – a beautiful verse – about our relationship with God through our faith in Jesus Christ. This relationship change occurs through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in Romans Paul wrote about our being slaves to God – a bondservant – sold out to God. This is our perspective. Here, Paul writes that God doesn’t view us as slaves as we would think, but beloved children.

Abused slaves lived in fear, we are not abused slaves. While we may have sold ourselves out to God, God adopts us into God’s very family. The relationship we have now with God is not some strained relationship. His use of the word *abba* was the Aramaic word of endearment for a father. It wasn’t formal, it was very loving.

So, Paul uses two different ideas to describe our relationship with God – slaves and children. They aren’t used to contradict one another, but to give us two different perspectives on our relationship with God.

8:16 – The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

The spirit communicates with us to let us know that we are God's children. I pray you have had heard this from God's Spirit. It is a peace that certainly passes all understanding. It gives us confidence that it is not our efforts that bring us to God, but God's mercy.

Our communication with the Holy Spirit is not one sided – the Spirit communicates to us.

8:17 – Now if/since 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.

We sure do like this co heirs of God and co heirs with Christ stuff! But there is a condition – if we share in his sufferings. If we share in his sufferings we will share in his glory.

I spoke about suffering with Jesus a few weeks ago. Do we sacrifice our time, resources, money for the causes of Christ? Are we willing to be different (holy), even at the risk of people excluding of because of our differences?

The Bible is clear, those who are willing to suffer with Jesus will share in Jesus' glory. This, however, is not the truth many want to hear.

Paul continues his thought about suffering in the following verses.

8:18 – I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Some question whether or not Paul is ignoring or glossing over the enormous level of pain and suffering that we find in the world. No, instead he is elevating the glory to come.

Paul was no stranger to pain, suffering, and persecution. He, himself, had endured beatings, stoning, imprisonment, hunger, shipwreck, and much more. Yet, all of that was not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed.

8:19 – For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

This verse often gets glossed over as we tend to focus on the next two verses, but this is an important verse!

Paul is stating that creation seems to be aware that something better is coming! By creation, Paul is referring to all that God has made. All that God has created is waiting for that time when all will be made right.

The other powerful statement in this verse is that a time will come when the children of God are revealed. Obviously, Paul is looking to a time to come. We might call it ‘an end time.’

Paul expected to see that end time during his lifetime. So have many others. We should live our lives as if we could experience that time at any moment, yet – as was Paul – always moving forward in our spiritual lives and always moving forward with the good news.

8:20 – For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that^[h] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Verse 20 says that creation was subjected to frustration / futility / even suffering. The Greek word implies something that had lost its purpose. This happened when sin entered the world.

God did not create the world that way – the world was created with purpose – to glorify God.

Verse twenty speaks of the will of the one who subjected it – Adam. Adam’s sin – our sin – has subjected creation to frustration and futility.

But there is hope there at the end of verse twenty, and we find it in verse 21. Hope – an expectation that creation would be liberated from its affliction.

Verse 19 says that creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. Verse 21 re-emphasizes that verse.

The same freedom that those in Christ will receive – so will creation. All suffering will end – for all creation.

This is actually the way that the Bible ends at the end of revelation.

8:22 – We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Creation will be restored to its intended purpose, but that time has not come. In fact, creation groans. This includes the natural world and humanity, as we see in the next verse.

Humanity is groaning! We certainly see that in the news.

8:23 – Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

We are the firstfruits of the Spirit, yet we groan inwardly along with creation. We are waiting for the redemption of our bodies – that is – we are waiting for the glory of God to be revealed in us.

1 John 3:2 – Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,^[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

8:24 – For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Verse 24 says for in this hope we were saved. Perhaps a better translation would be – for **into** this hope we were saved.

The gift of salvation is a guarantee of what is to come – but it is not here yet. Remember – Paul is writing about the things in life we suffer through.

8:18 – I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

We have hope – expectation – and we wait patiently.

8:26 – 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.

This is an often quoted verse by man, including myself. The context here is describing the difference between our future and our present. And in the present we often groan, longing for the restoration of creation – and for our restoration. Here and now we suffer through afflictions.

The Spirit will help us through our days in the here and now.

In the here and now we are weak in ourselves – but the Spirit is here with us. We need to quit suffering and start living with and through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

8:27 – 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.

One way that the Spirit helps us in our weakness is by interceding for us. The spirit knows our unspoken prayers, yet the Spirit also leads us into God’s will.

This doesn’t mean we no longer have a responsibility to pray and just leave it up to the Holy Spirit.

Let’s take for an example – we have a dilemma, a decision to make and we are not sure what we should do. We pray to God but then we just don’t know how to pray about the situation any longer.

The Spirit then intercedes for us. Prays for us to stay in the will of God.

If we are spiritual people, we will be led by the Spirit to make the right decision.

8:28 – And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[1] have been called according to his purpose.

This is an often quotes verse of scripture – and an often mis-applied verse. Yes, God can work some good into most any event, but this verse has been used to comfort folks during unspeakable tragedies.

This verse – when we explore its context – which we are about to do – is about in the end we will be with God in heaven.

In verses 18-23 Paul was describing the life of Christians in this side of heaven as one of groaning as we long to escape the suffering of this life and be with God.

In verses 24-25 we are told that we wait in the sure hope of the day that our bodies will be resurrected and we will share in God's glory.

So – what do we make of all the hard stuff that comes along while we are waiting to be with God in glory – that is where this verse comes in. For those that love God – i.e. Christians – God's going to work it out for you in the end.

In its simplest form this verse points back to verse 18 – I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

It will all be ok, because one day you will be with God.

The word good in verse 28 doesn't necessarily mean happy, pleasant, painless. It means for our benefit.

8:29 – 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.

Here is another verse that gets mis interpreted. Much of the controversy over this passage deals in whether or not God allows us any free will in our choice of whether or not to be a part of God's kingdom.

I heard it explained that the way to salvation is that which is predestined.

Chapter nine will explore this in more detail.

Until then – the bottom line of this verse is that God has a plan for we who are in Christ, and that is to be more and more conformed into the image of Christ.

I hope that you are moving towards conformity.

8:30 – And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

For those of us who have been saved into this plan of salvation that God had preordained, he now calls us. God then justifies us – the first four chapters of this letter dealt with justification – being made right with God.

For all justified God will glorify. In verse thirty this is past tense – as if God has already done it. That was a method to emphasize what will happen. It's as good as done.

The rest of this chapter is one of the most encouraging and affirming passages in all of God's word, much less this one letter. Keep in mind its context.

Paul has just affirmed that God is for all who are in Christ Jesus – in fact our glorification with Christ in glory is as good as done. So, what can prevent this glorification from happening?

8:31 – What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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?

How about we just take a second and let this amazing truth sink in – The one true God, creator of the universe, is for us! With God for us, what could ever possibly be against us?

The word that we translate as against could be translated as down – what could possibly bring us down since God is for us?!

Of course, anyone could be against us in a literal sense, but if glory in heaven awaits us, what consequence could ever bring us down?

The all things that God will give us in verse 32 refers once again to the glory that we will one day share.

8:33 – Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Whom God has chosen – we find this word chosen or elect, and we think of predestination. The ones whom God has chosen are those who have made the decision to put their faith in Jesus.

The way to salvation is predestined – elected – chosen. We have free will to stand with in the elected process or not.

Paul begins in this verse to use legal language, using the vocabulary from a courtroom trial. We are asked who will bring charges? Sin would be the likely one to bring charges against us.

However, God has justified us. The Greek word for justified means to be approved as innocent, acquitted.

8:34 – 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.

Paul began this chapter with – there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The reason why this is so is found in found in this verse.

We who are ‘in Christ’ are so closely associated with Christ that in God’s eyes the death of Christ has already paid the price for our sin.

Jesus stands by the Father to intercede for us. Again, we have a legal term. Jesus is our advocate who argues our case before God. Picture Jesus as you stand before God saying – I died for this person, they are in me, the penalty is paid.

Therefore – there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. That’s good stuff!

8:35 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

We must never interpret the harsh realities of earthly life as evidence of God’s lack of love for us. As we will see in this beautiful and famous passage, God loves us so much that God brings us through these worldly troubles.

John 16:33 – “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

For those who are in Christ, we, too, can have inner peace as we – along with Jesus – overcome this world.

8:36 – As it is written:

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

Paul is quoting from Psalm 44:22.

Some interpret this verse to show that that God’s people have suffered hardships for generations.

I don’t see it this way at all. This verse begins with – as it is written. I see it as – Is it as it is written? Or we might say – Afterall it is written.

The next verse bears witness to interpreting it this way.

8:37 – No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The term ‘more than conquerors’ comes from the Greek word (hoop-er-nik-ah'-o) which means to prevail mightily, or an exceedingly great victory. Also, the verb tense is continual. Not only have we prevailed mightily, we are continuing to prevail mightily, and we will always prevail mightily!

Does that mean that troubles will cease? No, but it means that with God’s help we will continue to prevail mightily. Most of all – through Christ we will always prevail over the power of sin which would separate us from God.

Which is where Paul goes from here.

8:38 – For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Paul has a new list of things that people feel are against them. Paul begins with death – I mean if death can’t separate us from the love of God, what else could?

However, we suffer through things in this life which can make some feel as if God is far away – so Paul add life.

Life getting you down? Fear not, those things can't separate you from the love of God.

Why does he have angels? Does he mean fallen angels?

He is simply showing that nothing created, even powerful things, can separate us from the love of God.

Then the NIV has demons. The KJV and others have principalities. The Greek word is *archai*, and while it was sometimes used to depict a political leader – usually a wicked political leader, and often used to depict demons.

This – demons – is probably Paul's intent here since it comes right after angels.

In other words – nothing natural or supernatural can separate us from the love of God.

Then Paul has the present nor the future. Nothing can happen today, tomorrow, or a thousand years from now, that could ever separate us from the love of God.

Next, Paul has any powers. This is the Greek word (*doo'-nam-is*), which we get dynamite from. Any powers would also refer to natural or supernatural, and political and governmental powers.

For those Christians even today who live under oppressive governments who suppress Christianity – they know that they are not separated from the love of God.

Paul would eventually die under a oppressive government – but that did not separate him from the love of God.

8:39 – 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.

Paul now adds height nor depth – nothing that can comedown from above or rise up from below. And then he throws in the all inclusive – nor anything else in all of creation.

In other words – God loves you and there is nothing that you can do about it!

Romans

Chapter 9

Chapters 9-11 has been the cause of some debate over the past several centuries. Namely, were these chapters originally part of Paul's letter to the Romans, or are they a separate letter from Paul.

The main reason for this debate is that there seems to be an abrupt topic change beginning in chapter 9 that runs through chapter 11.

Also, if you read the end of chapter 8 and then read the beginning of chapter 12, there doesn't seem to be any subject change.

Romans 8:38 – For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ 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 12:1 – 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.

But not all scholars agree with this theory. We know that Paul dictated his letters, and in many of his longer letters we have Paul jumping from a subject to cover something else, then come back to his original subject.

Also, the subject that Paul jumps to here in Romans 9-11 is the righteousness of God, which certainly is not out of line for a letter that is introducing Paul and his theology to the church in Rome.

Whether a separate piece or not, we will study it and glean what we can.

9:1 – I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Paul has just finished making the case that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, all who come to God by faith in Christ will be loved by God forever. Nothing in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.

This may have led Paul to think of his own people, the Jews of Israel. Some Jewish people had come to faith in Jesus, but the majority of Christians by this time in Paul's life were pagan converts.

Paul shows here how deeply that hurts him.

9:3 – 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,⁴ 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.⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!^[a] Amen.

We can certainly tell that Paul is heartbroken about the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Christ.

Paul then lists many of the things the Israelites had been given by God, describing why they were a special people. He writes about adoption. This is probably not the same as the adoption for those who trust in Jesus for salvation, but rather he adopted them as a nation – to be God's representatives – to be God's different kind of people – holy.

Paul lists glory – speaking back to the time of Moses.

Then covenants. This would include God's covenant agreements with Abraham and David.

Then the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. The most important promise is that the Messiah would come from the people of Israel, which he mentions in verse five as the final privilege that was given to the Jews.

9:6 – It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

Paul now begins to deal with a question that will dominate the next two and a half chapters. If God gave to Israel all of those benefits and covenants, what happens to God’s relationship with Israel now that they have rejected the messiah?

Paul’s first response in this verse is to defend the character of God. God’s word has not failed. Then Paul begins to make a distinction between the physical descendants of Israel and the spiritual descendants – or as some say – the true Israel.

9:7 – 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.”

Paul is giving an example from Israel’s history that even before Jesus, not all of Abraham’s offspring were counted as children of Abraham – not in the Jewish sense of that term. Abraham’s son Ishmael, and his children with Keturah, after Isaac, were not counted as children of Abraham by the Jews.

Paul quotes from Genesis 21:12 where God said to Abraham that it would be through Isaac that his descendants would be named.

9:8 – 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. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”^[c]

In John chapter 8, the religious leaders are looking for a way to trap Jesus, and Jesus tells them basically that while they were descended from Abraham, that God was not their father.

John 8:47 – “Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

In verse nine Paul quotes from Genesis 17 & 18.

9:10 – Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”^[d] ¹³ Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”^[e]

Some might question why God would choose one over the other. First, it had nothing to do with one being better than the other. Now, the ancient Jews grew into a mindset that it was about being better. Many Christians live with a mindset that it is about being better than other.

Paul has already made it clear in this letter that everyone – Christians as well as non believers, sin and fall short of God’s glory.

Biblical election is about being chosen for a purpose. As I spoke about this morning – we are chosen to declare God’s praises so that others may see.

If someone see’s God’s glory, and chooses to put their faith in Jesus, then they become chosen to declare God’s praises.

Also, in the story of Jacob and Esau, God chose the second born, which in the eyes of the world would have been unworthy for the promise. We see this happen over and over again.

God chose David over Goliath.

Moses over Pharaoh.

Joseph, the baby, over all of his brothers.

1 Corinthians 1:28 – God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

Now there in verse 13 we may be troubled by Paul’s quote from the prophet Malachi where Malachi quotes God saying that God loved Jacob and hated Esau.

The biblical words for love and hate are not referencing an emotion. Love and hate were used to describe an action. So love and hate used by Malachi refers to an action of choosing one and not the other.

Likewise, we are supposed to love / agape / all people. This does not refer to how we feel emotionally about people, but how we act towards people.

Now Paul will ask the question that he knew would be on the mind of his readers – is this unjust?

9:14 – What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

Paul is quoting God’s words to Moses from Exodus 33:19. In that passage God was reassuring Moses that God would be with Moses while he was leading the Israelites. And God was preparing Moses to catch a glimpse of God’s glory.

It was in that context that God was telling Moses that God would show mercy and compassion on whomever God chose.

Ultimately, it is upon those who put their faith in Jesus that God has mercy upon.

9:16 – It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

Paul makes it clear that God’s mercy has nothing to do with our efforts. No one can earn their way into God’s good graces.

Ephesians 2:8 – For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

In the next verse, Paul will offer another Old Testament example.

9:17 – 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.”^[g] ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Paul is quoting from Exodus 9:16. God was saying that Egypt and Pharaoh were raised up into power over the Israelites for the very purpose of God displaying God’s power through the exodus to come.

Some have difficulty understanding God hardening someone’s heart. This is similar to what Paul wrote in **Romans 1:24** – Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts.

Does God make some people good and some people bad? No, but God allows bad people to stay bad, even handing them over to their evil desires.

9:19 – One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?”

Good question! If God can harden our hearts or hand us over to our sinful desires, why blame us for our sinful behavior? Some folks don’t like Paul’s answer, but it tells us something about ourselves that we don’t like to hear.

9:20 – 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?’”^[h] ²¹ 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?

Who are we? Paul quotes from the prophet Isaiah and asks shall what is formed talk back to the one who formed it?

The question is meant to be rhetorical. The answer is no. Created things don’t talk criticize their creator. As hard as it is on our sense of pride, we must always recognize that God has no obligation to us.

This is what makes the Good News so unbelievably Good! God doesn’t owe us mercy, or love, or grace!

The love and mercy we receive is absolutely and completely undeserved and unearned.

While Paul's answer seems harsh, it's beyond argument. However, if God owed anyone any amount of mercy at all, then the element of grace would be removed.

So the truth of this difficult passage is that as sovereign, God has the right to do anything that God desires with his creation. Yet – God chooses to show profound mercy and grace through salvation.

9:22 – 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?

Some people ignore the verses about the wrath of God. They don't want to think of God as angry. JD Walt in his daily devotion had a great devotional about the wrath of God this past week.

He explained it this way – “What if the wrath of God is simply the presence of God as experienced by anyone unprepared for it. By way of analogy, consider the sun. The wrath of the sun is not found in its emotional state but as a natural consequence of its presence. Without the protection of the atmosphere we could not live in the presence of the sun. By the mercy of God we have been covered by a protective atmosphere in which we cannot only look upon the sun, but we can enjoy and flourish in its warmth.”

“What if God's wrath is akin to the experience of the presence of the sun without any atmospheric protection? What if we thought of God's holiness as the luminously fierce brightness of ten thousand suns? It would be a wrathful experience for anyone unprepared for such a holy presence. They simply could not exist there. It's why we understand hell as eternal separation from God.”

Ephesians 2:3 – All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

9:23 – 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—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Prepared in advance for glory is not about predestination. Glory was prepared in advance. However, what we should note is the patience that God shows even though by God's very nature – holiness – we can not stand in its presence.

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

9:25 – 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,”

Paul quotes from Hosea 2:23. Originally this was understood to be about God's commitment to one day restore the exiled northern tribes of Israel.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul understands this to apply to Gentiles and Jews. Peter does the same thing in 1 Peter 2:10.

In this passage from Hosea, God has showed mercy on whom God will show mercy, including the Gentiles.

9:26 – 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.’”

This quote is from Hosea 1:10.

Again, his point is that God shows mercy to whomever God desires to show mercy. God has chosen to show mercy to those who come to faith in God through Jesus Christ.

9:27 – Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

Now Paul quotes from Isaiah 10:22-23. The Israelites have become like the sand of the sea – meaning that God has kept God’s promise to Abraham.

That promise, however, does not obligate God to save every child of Israel. In fact, only a remnant will be saved.

9:29 – 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.”^[1]

Paul now emphasizes the idea that a remnant will be saved. This highlights the fact that God had not, and would not, allow the spiritual nation of Israel to be destroyed completely.

This quote is from Isaiah 1:9.

9:30 – What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

In verse thirty Paul asks – what then shall we say? In other words – The Jews had practiced righteousness for generations had not received salvation, but the Gentiles who had not been trying to be righteous are now considered righteous?

The answer is simple – and it is a statement that Paul makes many times over and over again throughout his letters. Those who seek to be made right with God by works will never attain it.

Trying to obtain righteousness before God by works is stumbling over a stone. Who is that stone? Let’s continue.

9:33 – 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.”

Paul uses two quotes from Isaiah in this verse.

To make his point that this idea of the Jews stumbling over salvation by faith alone, Paul quotes from Isaiah 8:14.

Then he quotes from Isaiah 28:16 to show that belief in him – him being Jesus – is what brings us to God.

Chapter 10

In chapter 10 Paul continues to share his sorrow over Israel’s rejection of Christ Jesus.

10:1 – Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Certainly a good number of Jews at the beginning of the Church became Christians, but as a nation the Jews had rejected Jesus.

I love verse two – they have religious zeal, but not zeal for Jesus. Their zeal was not based on knowledge.

It is my sincere belief that this describes many Christians in our country today. They don’t have the knowledge of God. Most of this lack of knowledge of God comes from being biblically illiterate.

This is why I always – always – stress the study of the Bible.

10:3 – Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

Verse three says that the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness. This is prideful, and pride separates people.

Ephesians 2:8 – it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Boasting – pride, leads to divisions. Prideful people don't want to be around people who don't meet the standards that they have attained.

In the days of Jesus, the Jewish people had become very pride filled, and therefore very separated.

Yes, we are to be different – but that doesn't mean that we separate from others. Indeed, we are called to be different for the very reason that others may notice us.

Matthew 5:16 – “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

10:4 – Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The law was not meant to stand on its own. The law points to Jesus. Paul says that Christ is the culmination of the law. Other translations have Christ is the end of the law.

The Greek word is telos – and while it can be translated as end – it means in a fulfilling and complete way.

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:17 – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

10:5 – Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”

Paul is pointing to a teaching of Moses found in Leviticus 18. It describes a path to righteousness for those who keep the law. In the context of the Old Covenant, it was a means for Israel to honor their relationship with God.

However, such teaching also demonstrated that when it came to God's standards, nobody could achieve it.

Galatians 3:24 – The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

James put it this way – **James 2:10** – For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Now Paul describes a righteousness that is based on faith.

10:6 – But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”^[b] (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷“or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’”^[c] (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

“Do not say in your heart” – This is from Deuteronomy 9. Paul doesn't quote the entire passage, but his Jewish readers would have understood the context.

The context is significant. God was telling Israel not to deceive themselves about the promised land. They were not taking possession of it because of their own righteousness.

Next he uses a partial quote from Deuteronomy 30. In that chapter God says that the command that God had given was not so hard that they would have to ask who will go up to heaven so that we can attain this.

Paul makes the connection to Jesus. When it comes to salvation no one has to ask – who will go up to heaven to bring Jesus down here so that we can be saved.

Likewise – they didn't need to look for someone to rise up from the dead to save them. This could possibly be in reference to the Jews looking for the return of Elijah.

In other words, no one has to move heaven or hell in order to be right with God. Indeed, Jesus already did that!

10:8 – But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”^[d] that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

Paul finishes the quote of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in this verse. God was telling them that the word was near to them, in their hearts and mouths. Paul applies this verse to the idea of faith in Christ.

The Israel of Paul's day kept looking for a Messiah to come down from heaven. Jesus was near to them through faith. Jesus is near to us through faith, as well.

The word is on our lips and in our hearts in the sense that we only have to confess with our lips and believe in our heart – which leads to the next two verses.

10:9 – 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. ¹⁰ 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.

While these two verses are extremely important in the life of a Christian – unfortunately some Christians think that this is all there is to being a Christian. Paul is clear here that he is speaking of justification – being right with God.

Paul is very clear that the process of sanctification is an ongoing, lifelong, process.

But let us not overlook the power of this verse, especially in light of how many Christians still are trying to be good enough to get to heaven.

No one is good enough except Jesus.

Trust in Jesus has to be in our hearts or our confession falls short. But thanks be to God for God's plan of salvation!

10:11 – As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”^[e] ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”^[f]

Paul seems to be addressing some claim that there was one way for the Jews to be saved and another for the Gentiles. He makes it clear, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16 & Joel 2:32.

Verse 13 is quoting from the Old Testament, and those Jews understood the Lord to be God. In the Old Testament, and for the Jews of Paul's day and today – Calling on the Lord was calling upon God.

Again we see Paul's understanding of Jesus and God being one and the same

Paul has just quoted from the prophet Joel saying that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, Paul begins a series of questions aimed at what is required to bring someone to the point of calling on Jesus' name to be saved. He seems to have the Jews in mind.

10:14 – How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7.

We have a profound truth here that Christians need to understand and get behind! Preaching is not the first thing that needs to be done so that someone might hear the word, then understand, then be saved.

Sending is the first step. Churches don't do enough sending.

True, we are all sent to be in the mission field wherever we are – but we still need to support and encourage those who are sent with the specific full time responsibility of being sent.

We have a few ministries that we support financially to those who have been sent, but our support of those ministries is woefully small.

Pray about what we can do to better support those who have been sent.

10:16 – But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” (Isaiah 53:1) ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Paul is referring to his what he just outlined, the steps that must occur to bring a person to call on the name of the Lord.

10:18 – But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:
“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.”^[i]

Paul uses a quote from Psalm 19:4 to confirm that the Jews have, indeed, heard the message about Jesus. So, verse 14 says that one has to hear before they believe, but their refusal to believe is not because they haven't heard.

By the time Paul wrote this message, the Jews of that time had heard of Jesus, and most had heard not just about Jesus, but why some of the Jews were calling Jesus the Messiah.

So, they had heard, but why did they not understand?

10:19 – 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.”

Paul quotes from the second half of Deuteronomy 32:21. The first half of that verse describes God's words about Israel in the days of Moses. It says, “They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols.”

So God said that God was angry and jealous, then God says that God will make Israel angry and jealous – by a nation that has no understanding.

That was prophecy about the Gentiles who during the time of Moses had no understanding, but now they do.

10:20 – 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.”^[k]
²¹ But concerning Israel he says,
“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.”^[l]

Verse 20 quotes Isaiah 65:1, and refers to the Gentiles.

The chapter ends with a quote from Isaiah 65:2. It answers the question – if they have heard why don't the Jews believe. Quoting from Isaiah, Paul says it is disobedience.

Romans

Chapter 11

Tonight we begin chapter 11 of Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. Remember, chapters 9-11 have been debated somewhat. The reason is the abrupt subject change. However, what is written in these chapters is in no way out of context for this letter.

In this section Paul addresses the righteousness of God.

11:1 – 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.

Paul gives that familiar answer – by no means. It is from the Greek *me genoito* which was a strong emphatic 'may it never be!'

In response to the question – has God rejected the Israelites, Paul points to himself as the evidence that God has not rejected anyone from the true Israel.

11:2 – 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: ³“Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”^[a]?

In the Old Testament we find many places where God says that he will never forsake or abandon his people. Paul is going to show that that promise still stands.

To this point, Paul points towards a conversation between the prophet Elijah and God about the people of Israel. The quote is from 1 Kings 19. Elijah had defeated the priests of Baal. But Jezebel said she was going after Elijah. Elijah becomes discouraged and tells God that he is the only one left.

Let's read on to see God's answer.

11:4 – And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”^[b] ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Paul continues to quote from 1 Kings 19. God proclaims that there is yet a remnant. Verse five tells us that this promise remains.

This remnant is by God’s grace. In other words, the remnant didn’t remain because they were better than other Jews. Just as we are saved not by being better, but by grace.

The next verse not only summarizes that point, but stands alone as a crucial part of Christian theology.

11:6 – And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Grace cannot be mixed with good works. Either salvation is attained according to God’s grace, or it is earned by deeds.

There is no gray area between works based salvation and grace based salvation. While we might say Amen to this – consider what we are saying.

Your attendance in worship doesn’t earn God’s favor.

Your participation in rituals doesn’t earn God’s favor.

Your generosity towards ministry doesn’t earn God’s favor.

We do those things and more in response to God’s favor, but God’s grace is totally free. Anything less, and as Paul wrote in 11:6 – then grace would no longer be grace.

11:7 – What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened,

Remember, anyone who chooses Jesus is part of the elect.

What is elected is the way to salvation.

You may be someone who rejects Jesus. Then, after a time you choose Jesus. You are then part of the elect.

God didn't choose some Jews to choose Jesus and some Jews to accept Jesus. However, those who chose to accept Jesus are part of the elect.

11:8 – 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.”

Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 29 & Isaiah 29. We often have difficulty understanding how a loving God – a God of which the New Testament tells us that does not want anyone to perish but to come to repentance – How could this same God cloud their minds and give them a spirit of stupor.

I believe the best way to understand this is to recall what Paul wrote in Romans 1.

Romans 1:21 – For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

1:24 – Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts

Jesus said something similar when he sent the twelve in Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:14 – If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.

Sometimes, God shakes the dust of God's sandals and moves on. Will God welcome those who later repent? Of course, but the harvest is ready for some, and not for others.

11:9 – And David says:

“May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.
¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever.”^[d]

Paul continues the thought of the previous verse. The eyes of some have become darkened to the things of God.

Paul quotes from Psalm 69. Psalm 69 is often described as a psalm about the Messiah. It speaks of the enemies of the Messiah.

Paul adds the thought of a stumbling block, connecting to Isaiah 8:14. Paul had quoted Isaiah 8:14 in chapter 9.

Remember, I said that God would not turn away those who's hearts have hardened if they repent. Paul speaks of that now.

11:11 – 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.

Paul says did they stumble never to recover and he answers with his customary declaration – By no means! Here in the NIV translated as Not at All!

God plan was for the Jewish people to be a light to the Gentiles. We find this thought throughout the Old Testament. Often in the Book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 49:6 – “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

In a way, they were a light to the Gentiles in that Salvation came through Jesus, a Jew. However, with their rejection of Jesus, God will make the Jews jealous through the Gentiles.

11:12 – 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!

What Paul is saying here is this – If Israel's sin (of rejecting Christ) can result in the glory of the Gentiles being saved (that's us), then how much more glory will it be when Israel accepts Christ.

Paul will fully answer this in verse 15.

11:13 – I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

In Acts 9:15, the Lord tells Ananias that Paul will proclaim the message to the Gentiles and all of Israel. When one reads the Book of Acts, we discover that in every city Paul preached in, he always preached first to the Jews. He had some success, but by and large his greatest success was with the Gentiles.

Paul's desire, we are told here, is that as the Jews would take note of the relationship that the Gentiles had with God and seek the same.

While there have always been some Jewish converts to Christianity, this has never been the case on a large scale.

11:15 – For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

There has been much debate as to what Paul means here when he writes that Israel's acceptance of Jesus will result in life from the dead. Some have actually stated that this meant the Jews who died before Israel's acceptance of Jesus.

I don't think so. Paul speaks of all who come to have faith in Jesus as having passed from death to life. The Apostle John uses the same words to describe our new life in Christ.

11:16 – If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Paul is talking about Israel's place in Christianity, and he is looking forward to the time when they will accept salvation through faith alone. Here, in verse sixteen, he uses two illustrations as he looks forward to that time.

In the first illustration, Paul is referencing the Jewish practice of offering the dough made from the first of the grain harvest. We find this in the Old Testament book of Numbers. The dough, set apart, would sanctify anything it came in contact with.

The second illustration – if the root is holy, so are the branches – is one that Paul will build on in the following verses. The nature of branches is determined from the health of the root from which they grow.

Who are the first fruits that Paul writes about? Who is the root?

Some say they are the patriarchs – Abraham, Moses, Isaac and such as those.

Others say he is referring to the first Jewish people to accept Jesus, namely the apostles.

Continuing the thought of roots and branches, Paul uses the analogy of a common practice among the olive farmers – how caretakers would often transplant a branch from one tree to another.

11:17 – 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, ¹⁸ 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.

Paul is now speaking directly to his Gentile listeners. The Gentiles have been grafted onto this metaphorical tree. They (us) were receiving nourishment through those holy roots. Here, most certainly speaking of the patriarchs and prophets.

Perhaps, some of the Gentile converts were harsh or dismissive about the lack of faith among many of the Jewish people. Even today, there are some who falsely seek to justify antisemitism because of Israel's rejection of Jesus.

11:19 – You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Paul is urging them to learn something and stay humble. Learn that even so called good church people can drift from God's truth.

Many of the Jews rejected Jesus because they believed that salvation required works. Today, there are Christians who say that they accept Jesus, but they really are depending upon works – or at least being better than most other people.

God rejected those Jews who depended upon works. God will reject Gentiles (us) who do the same.

11:22 – 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.

Here are two great pillars of God’s nature – kindness and sternness. God is kind, but God is uncompromising.

God is kind – because eternal salvation is offered through faith, not by works. God is uncompromising in that God doesn’t allow any other way other than faith alone.

To continue in God’s kindness means that we continue in faith. So, Paul says that without faith in Christ, we, too, will be cut off.

11:23 – And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ 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!

Verse 23 is important in this chapter. Someone’s current state of unbelief – or untrust – does not have to be the end of the story. Those who have been pruned from this metaphorical tree can be grafted back into it.

11:25 – 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, ²⁶ and in this way^[a] all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;

he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

²⁷ And this is^[b] my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”^[c]

Paul believed – and our hope is – that there will come a time when the Jewish people as a whole come to faith in salvation apart from works.

Paul mentions that this will come about when the full number of Gentiles – or the fullness of the Gentiles – have come to faith. Two things about this:

First, we don't know what that number is, but it's not obviously what we have right now. This is why, in part, the Church must always be involved in evangelism. Of course, Jesus gave us that mandate.

Secondly, that does not mean that all Gentiles or all Jews will come to faith, but that is our hope and our prayer.

In verse 26 & 27 Paul quotes prophecy of Israel coming to faith from Isaiah 59 & Isaiah 27.

11:28 – As far as the gospel/good news (meaning salvation through faith apart from works) is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Paul agrees that the Jews are enemies of the message of salvation through faith alone. This is not a call to antisemitism. It simply means that they disagree that being right with God requires only faith.

Unfortunately, by practice, and perhaps by thought, there are many Christians who believe that salvation requires some form of works.

In this same verse, Paul describes the Jewish people as beloved by God. There still remains a special relationship. The Messiah came through Israel. Almost every author in the Bible came from Judaism. Verses 25 – 27 which we just read looks to a time when Israel will return to God through Jesus.

Verse 29 makes it clear, the call and the gift of being God's chosen remain. Why? Paul, as we have read, foresaw a time when they will return.

11:30 – Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now ^[h] receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

Paul is repeating one of the main themes of this chapter. He is saying once more to the Gentile Christians that though they were once disobedient and did not deserve mercy, yet God was gracious to them. This was true – in part – because the Jews rejected Christ.

11:31 – For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

When we study the Bible, always remember – context – context – context. Some people have taken this verse out of context and promoted universalism. That is – everyone will receive God’s mercy and be saved.

Do not forget, Paul has already in chapter 10:9-10 – and in other letters – made it clear that salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

Before our faith in Jesus Christ, each of us had been bound over to disobedience. When we turned to Jesus Christ, we received mercy.

Paul has just concluded a long and complicated section about God’s unique relationship with Israel as a people. Now, Paul launches into a poetic, hymn like praise of God and God’s amazing wisdom.

He starts by marveling at God’s wisdom, knowledge & judgments.

11:33 – Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and^[i] knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

Now, Paul will ask two questions which come from Isaiah 40:13.

11:34 – “Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?”

To Paul, these are rhetorical questions. The answer to all godly people would be obvious – no one!

Paul then quotes from Job 41, again the answer is obvious.

And he ends this chapter with a great declaration about God – the universe belongs to God!

11:35 – “Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?”^[k]

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Chapter 12

A new section of this letter begins here in chapter twelve. He has concluded the section dealing with what it means to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Now he describes how it is that we who have faith in Jesus should live. But, more than that, how is it that we respond to God’s great mercy.

12:1 – 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.

“In view of God’s great mercy.” Paul just finished chapter eleven by stating that God does not owe us anything. Instead of death, though, he has given us life in Christ Jesus. And in the here and now, God has given us purpose. How shall we respond?

We respond by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice. Before Jesus, those who sought a relationship with the one true God would offer animals as sacrifices to God. This was done to show God how much God meant to them. Animals were currency & food. They would give that up as a sign that God was more important than life.

We show God how important God is to us by living a holy life. In other words, a life lived for God is now more important to us than a life lived for self.

12:2 – 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.

How are we to respond to God's great mercy? Verse one tells us we do that by living for God and not for self. Verse two tells us that we can't live for God while conforming to the world's ways. In other words – we are supposed to be different. And that word different is holy.

What is the pattern of the world? I think we all know. Looking out for self before all others. Seeking more and more of what the world can offer. Stuff, possessions, status.

1 John 2:15 – Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father^[d] is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

12:3 – 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.

If we are to live lives for God, and live in a different way than the way others live, we should start by seeing ourselves as we really are. This doesn't mean that we should think of ourselves as terrible or worthless. In fact, we should see ourselves as a new creation – made new by God's mercy and grace.

As a new creation, we live for our creator not for ourselves.

12:4 – For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Paul uses the analogy of the body and its various parts. He did this in 1 Corinthians 12, as well, going into more detail.

He's talking about our sacrificial life in Christ. Christians collectively form a body. We are the Body of Christ. Through God's Spirit we act collectively to be the very hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

Look at the end of verse five – each member belongs to all the others. Christians are – by God’s design – meant to be actively serving through and in the church. We belong to one another.

This is just a glimpse of what the presence of God’s glory will be like.

12:6 – We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Paul is writing about Spiritual gifts. Paul writes about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians and in Ephesians 4. Peter also writes of them in 1 Peter.

As I have taught and preached before – none of these lists of spiritual gifts are exhaustive. God’s Spirit can gift any of us to be used in various situations – and God does! We must remain open to the Spirit’s leadings.

In verse six Paul writes about prophesy. Our understanding of the word prophesy and the usage of the word in the New Testament differ. We tend to think it has something to do with end time predications.

The Greek word – prophéteia – meant the gift of communicating God’s truth. In other words – preaching.

The word we translate as serving is the word we are focusing on on Sunday morning – dee a cone knee ah. The root of this word referred to a servant who waited tables.

Teaching is a little different than prophesy. Just as what I do on Sunday mornings and what I do on Sunday afternoons is different. One is preaching / exhorting – and one is Bible study.

Similar and different.

Then we have encouraging. The interesting thing about this word is that the root of the word is the same word that Jesus uses in **John 14:26** – *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,*

whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The word – paraklésis – meant to come to one’s aid with encouragement, consolation or comfort.

Then we have giving. Straightforward. Means to give/impart.

Then to lead. The word literally meant to preside over. This leading could be administrative as well as worship or some other area.

Then mercy. Sometimes translated as pity.

12:9 – Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Here in verse nine, Paul begins a list of quick commands about how we should lead our everyday lives.

We all know that we should love one another, but Paul stresses the sincerity of our love. Ever fake a loving attitude towards someone because you know you’re supposed to love everyone?

We should seek the power of the Holy Spirit so that we don’t have to fake it – but show sincere and genuine love. With the power of the Holy Spirit – we will actually share the love of God – and that is always sincere.

Next Paul says to hate what is evil. The Greek word we translate as hate is *apostugeó* and it implies a revulsion towards something. We don’t just dislike it – it turns our stomachs. Friends – sin should turn our stomach. It should make us sick. Hate sin!

Then Paul has cling to what is good. The word that we translate as cling to – was the ancient Greek word for glue. Yes, glue has been around for a long time!

12:10 – Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

In verse nine Paul said that love must be sincere. The word he used for love in that verse was agape – an unconditional love. The word used for love in this verse in philadelphia – brotherly love – familial love.

You and I are truly brothers and sisters through the love of God. God has adopted us as God's children. And not just you and I, but Christians around the world – we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

The second part of this verse – the NIV has honor one another above yourselves. Some other translations have outdo yourselves in honoring others. The Greek is lead the way in honoring others – and I wish it were translated as such.

We are to lead the way in love and service. We should be examples of the love of Christ.

12:11 – Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

This verse is connected to the previous verse of leading the way in honoring one another. Don't lack in the zeal for honoring one another. By doing so we are serving the Lord.

The word we translate as zeal can be translated as enthusiasm. Are we enthusiastic for the things of God? We should be!

Then we have spiritual fervor – literally to be boiling hot! On fire for God!

Then Paul has serving the Lord. The word here for serving is not dee a cone knee ah – but the word here is the word for a slave.

12:12 – Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Three commands, and all three are essential for our emotional and spiritual well being.

First – rejoice or be joyful in hope. Remember biblical hope in an expectation. So, we aren't being told to be joyful because of circumstances in our life. Sometimes that is not possible. However, there is something within us that should remain joyful in the expectation we have of eternity with God.

Then – patient in affliction. This is possible only when we keep the other two commands – joy in what we expect to receive from God and through prayer.
No matter what this life presents to us – we have future with God worth celebrating – so be patient.

Then we are told to be faithful or persistent in prayer. Prayer connects us with God, and with God’s Holy Spirit.

12:13 – Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Remember, these Christians were involved in house churches – smaller groups of people who would meet in one another’s homes. Paul expected them to be taking care of one another – looking out for one another. We need more of that in the church.

Then we have practice hospitality. The word we translate as hospitality – philoxenia – is an interesting word. It comes from the word philio – which we get philadelphia from. This word philoxenia literally means to show familial love to strangers.

So, in verse 13 we have a command to share with our church family, and a command to share with strangers.

Romans

Chapter 12

Last we we ended with Romans 12:13. In verse nine of chapter 12, Paul began a list of quick commands about how we should lead our everyday lives. They should all be incorporated into our lives for they paint a picture of what the living sacrifice looks like.

Remember, that’s how Paul began this chapter.

12:1 – 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.

Let's review this list through verse 13.

12:9 – Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12:14 – Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

This echoes the teaching of Jesus in **Matthew 5:44** – But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

It is possible that Paul was speaking about the persecution of Christians, but the principle applies to us. We must be willing to suffer for Jesus.

Bless and do not curse – we are not to speak ill of people who oppose us. This includes not speaking evil of people who oppose our political or social values.

12:15 – Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

We are to love as Jesus loves us. Nothing communicates sincere love (verse 9) for another more powerfully than recognizing and joining in their highs and lows.

We show love by empathizing.

12:16 – Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.

Live in harmony with one another. The word that we translate as harmony is *fron-eh'-o* and it literally means to think about and have an understanding.

We should seek to have an understanding of others. In the previous verse Paul was talking about empathizing with one another. Living in harmony – thinking about and seeking an understanding of others is part of that.

Do not be proud – literally – don't think about yourself.
Don't be conceited. Literally don't think of yourself as intelligent. The implication would be smarter than others. In this case – the lowly – the uneducated.

One of the early attractions to Christianity was that all classes of people became close. Women, slaves, people of low social standing, as well as slave owners and rich folk.

12:17 – Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

Repaying evil for evil – this is a difficult one. I'm not talking about physical violence or retaliation. I'm talking about someone saying something mean spirited to you, or about you.

How is it we respond? Do we talk them down to others?
There are common everyday interactions in which this verse would apply.

When Paul says to be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone – please don't misinterpret this. Paul is not saying that we have to make everyone happy. We cannot!

The Greek word for right in this verse is kalos good and even beautiful.
This verse means to do good towards others. That might make many happy, but not everyone.

12:18 – If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

This is a great verse – one of which all Christians should take to heart. We should never let ourselves be the reason for a less than peaceful relationship with someone else.

Does this mean we won't have relationships turn less than peaceful? Well, the verse says as long as it depends on you.

This is not a call for us to roll over and be run over or taken advantage of by someone else. It is simply – and maybe not so simply – a biblical mandate to not cause dissension in our relationships with others.

12:19 – 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,”^[d] says the Lord.

If you think it’s difficult to let God be in charge of revenge, take a look at the next verse as we consider the radical nature of offering our lives as a living sacrifice.

When we think about not taking revenge, not retaliating in some way, we might think this means to retreat – to get away from the person at all costs. On the contrary!

12:20 – 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.”^[e]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The path is not to ignore the person. Instead, Paul quotes from proverbs 25 and tells us that we are called to be proactive in doing good for the other person.

Now, some would take this verse to an extreme, and it shouldn’t be. This is not a call to stay in a harmful or abusive situation.

Yet, it is still a difficult teaching.

What’s with the heaping of burning coals? Aren’t we trying to be nice, not harmful?

In the ancient world there was a custom that carrying a pan of hot coals on your head signified repentance.

What Paul is implying is that kindness to a rudeness could bring the rude person to repentance.

Verse 21 sums it all up – Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Chapter 13

In chapter 12, Paul described what it means to be a living sacrifice. It means that we even go so far as show love towards our enemies. Now, Paul turns his attention to how we should interact with the governing authorities.

13:1 – 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. ²Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³For 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. ⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Peter teaches this as well in 1 Peter 2.

Some are quick to point out that Paul says to submit to the authorities but does not call us to obey in every situation. That’s probably splitting hairs.

However, we know that Paul and the other apostles refused to obey the commands of people in authority to stop preaching the gospel.

Acts 5:29 – Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

Commentators like to report that the Apostles did submit to the authorities in all matters that were not in contradiction to the will of God.

Perhaps, what we can glean from this passage is that it is by God’s design that we have some form of government. That we are not a bunch of people living by our own laws and our own rules.

Humans beings were created to live in community. Community – society – needs laws and governance. This is by God’s design.

When Paul writes - The authorities that exist have been established by God – he is not endorsing particular politicians or governmental leaders. Paul is endorsing that governing principles are by God’s design.

Remember Jesus’ reply to Pilate – **John 19:11** – Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

Was Pilate a good man – no. However, the principle of governance is by God’s design.

In verse eight, Paul transitions from what is owed to human authorities to what is owed to everyone.

13:8 – Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

While this certainly applies to what we owe financially, Paul is getting at something more. He’s writing about our obligation as disciples of Jesus.

By saying that this debt of love remain outstanding, he is saying that it is a debt we continually pay towards – everyday. Of course, Paul is referring to Jesus’ teaching on love, which we see in the following verses.

13:9 – The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,”^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^[b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

When we read that love is the fulfillment of the law – Paul is not saying that we are made right with God by loving others. Paul has been clear in this letter – and in others – that righteousness before God is obtained through faith in Jesus.

And also note – this is not to say that if our neighbor is unhappy with us about something that we haven’t fulfilled the law.

We are commanded to speak the truth in love. That won’t make everyone happy. But we aren’t commanded to make everyone happy, but to love everyone.

13:11 – 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.

Why is it so important that we live our lives differently than the world? Because time is of the essence.

What does it mean, however, that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed? Were we not really saved then?

No. Paul, and other New Testament writers, made it clear that salvation has happened – we became righteous before God. Here, Paul is writing about our time of ultimate victory when we will reach eternity.

Paul believed in the immanent return of Jesus. Two thousand years later, we are still waiting. However, we could meet eternity at any moment. Life is uncertain. So, each of us should awake from spiritual slumber.

13:12 – 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. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.^[c]

The Greek word we translate as flesh is one that Paul uses quite often. The word – sarx – refers to our human nature. This goes with what I spoke about this morning. We must renew our minds – be transformed by the Holy Spirit – so that our human nature would not dominate our thoughts and actions.

Chapter 14

Romans 14:1-12 describes how Christians with opposing views should treat each other. As we all know, not every issue in our lives is given explicit guidance in the Bible. This leads to differences of opinion of how we should use our freedom in Christ.

14:1 – Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ²One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

What's this about? Were some strict vegetarians?

A Couple of possibilities. Perhaps some Jewish Christians had not been able to let go of dietary restrictions concerning kosher foods.

It was likely that daily life in Rome made it difficult to obtain kosher meats, so they chose to eat only vegetables.

Or, as Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians, some were concerned about buying meat from the meat market. Remember, pagan priests (and Jewish priests in some areas) made their living off of selling the meat that had been sacrificed.

So, in such a pagan place as Rome, it would have been difficult to purchase meat from the market that had not been part of a pagan ritual. This could have bothered the consciences of some Christians.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul basically said that idols weren't real, so there was no problem with the meat – it was just meat. He then said, however, if it causes someone much trouble, then just don't eat the meat.

Whatever the issue, Paul's statement about weakness seems to indicate his view that these believers did not yet have the strength of faith to be convinced that God's grace had freed them from such requirements.

Here in Romans 14, Paul doesn't correct them, but basically tells them to mind their own business. He doesn't condemn one side or the other.

Consider verse 3 again – The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

We can bring this into many areas of our Christian life today.

The one who celebrates Christmas must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not celebrate Christmas must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

The one who worships with contemporary music must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not worship with contemporary music must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

The one who baptizes by immersion must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not baptize by immersion must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

On and on we could go with this passage.

14:4 – 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.

Paul had said to both groups, do not despise or judge those who held opposite views than you. Now, he explains why.

He is saying – you are not that other Christians’ master. We are all servants of the same master – Jesus.

It is not the role of the servants to pass judgement on the other servants. Only the master of the servants can pass judgement.

14:5 – One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Paul continues to explore our different ways of expressing our faith and adoration to the Lord. We celebrate Ash Wednesday. Some denominations do, some don’t.

We observe the season of Advent and Lent. Some denominations do and some don’t.

These verses speak to us.

What we do as a church we do to give thanks to the Lord.

14:7 – For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Paul has been writing about things that we disagree on, and how we can't let such differences separate us.

Here, he makes it clear that we are not supposed to be lone Christians. Christians are to live in community. In a community, we don't serve our own agenda, we're all in it together.

Whatever we do – we do for the Lord. We are the Lord's in this life and in the life to come.

14:9 – For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

For this very reason – what reason is that?

We are the reason – whether we are alive or gone to glory. For us dead or beyond, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of the dead and the living.

Notice dead comes before the living. I think that was by design.

We will be much more alive in glory than now!

14:10 – You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister^[a]? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Our topic is our differences in the Body of Christ. Paul is not talking about doctrinal issues. He is talking about practices and customs in how we show our devotion to God.

For example – eating or not eating certain things. Observing or not observing certain days.

Now, he asks – why would ever see it as our place to judge or despise our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Paul writes of God’s judgement seat. Paul speaks of this judgement in 2 Corinthians 5:10. There, it is the judgment seat of Christ. Here, it is the judgment seat of God. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one.

Judgment is not ours to give.

14:11 – It is written:

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

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 45 to support the fact that it will be God who judges. So each of us will give an account of our own actions at that time. We won’t be comparing ourselves to others. Nor, will we be reporting on the actions of others.

14:13 – 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.

Not only are we not to pass judgment, we are not to put a stumbling block or obstacle in the way of other Christians.

What might these obstacles look like?

You don’t baptize this way so you can’t really be saved.

You don’t worship like we do so you are wrong.

You don’t celebrate the same liturgical calendar as we do, or celebrate the same religious holidays as we do, so you are wrong.

Christians are putting stumbling blocks in from of others still today.

14:14 – 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.

First and foremost, this principle applies to disputed issues such as baptism, worship, holidays and such. Perhaps to other areas, but this does not apply to areas in which Scripture is clear.

This doesn't apply to Christian morals and ethics. If you think it clean to have multiple wives – it's still unclean.

If you think it's ok to steal, it's not.

Let's take alcohol, for example. Some Christians think that any alcohol is unclean. Others believe that alcohol in moderation is fine/clean. Now, alcohol is a thing. It is neither clean nor unclean by itself.

Contemporary Christian music is a thing. It is neither clean nor unclean by itself.

If it's unclean for you, don't participate.

If it's clean, then fine for you.

14:15 – 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.

Paul is still on the subject of differences in Christian practice. Paul is here addressing those who are enjoying their freedom in Christ to eat whatever they want. Like he says in 1 Corinthians, he says that for the sake of others, just don't eat it.

We must not demand that everyone observe the same rituals as we. Indeed, Paul tells us to go further – even to forgo certain things if it causes someone difficulty.

This is a hard teaching in a culture that prizes our personal freedoms.

Let's put it into a modern perspective. Maybe there is a married couple and one of them won't go to church. They finally agree, but not to the church the other spouse goes to. The non going spouse just doesn't like it, but likes another church. They have a different style of preaching or worship. Biblically sound, just different.

Paul would tell the church going spouse to forgo their church and go to the other one with the non going spouse.

Philippians 2:3 – in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

14:16 – Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.

This verse has been interpreted in several ways, but remember the context. It seems to be that here Paul is saying in a round about way – put the interest of others above your own and don't argue about what you believe to be right o the point of loosing a brother or sister in Christ.

14:17 – For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Verse 17 is a popular verse, and I have used it many times. Now, the context here on Romans 14 is about the freedom to eat what one wants without concern to dietary laws or kosher laws.

However, we can replace eating and drinking with other things.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of worshipping with organs or guitars, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of worshipping on Saturday or Sunday, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

In verse 18 Paul is saying that when we focus on righteousness, peace and joy in the holy Spirit, we are pleasing to God and to others.

14:19 – Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰Do 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. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

Paul more or less sums up the whole argument in verse 19 – make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Mutual edification – meaning to build up one another.

In verse 21, Paul adds wine to the argument. Good point for modern day Christians. Some believe it is fine to partake of wine, beer or spirits in moderation while others don't.

If you are a Christian that believes it is fine, and you have a friend who does not think it is fine – don't partake in their presence. And both parties don't need to push their view on the others.

Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. If we can agree on that, if we can agree on the major issues of Christianity, let the other things go.

14:22 – 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.

If you believe wine is ok, or if you believe wine is not ok, keep that between you and God.

What about – Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

If we push our belief about one of the smaller points onto another, and in some way cause them to stumble, we have condemned ourselves.

Blessed is the one who does not do that.

14:23 – 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.^[c]

What Paul is saying here is basically make up your mind. Pray about it. Seek Scriptural guidance. Then make up your mind. Let what you do be done because of your faith in what you're doing.

Especially in those areas in which the Bible gives no clear direction, we have the liberty in Christ to make our own choice. If our conscience is telling us no, we have the liberty to refrain.

Romans

Chapter 15

Verses 1-7 in chapter 15 continue Paul's thought that finished chapter 14. Remember – the biblical writers did not write chapter and verse. They were added by printers as a study guide around the 1550's.

Very often it's clear that biblical scholars did not make these divisions of chapters, and this is one of them.

So, here in the opening verses of chapter 15, Paul continues to write about how those who are strong in their faith ought to treat those who are weak in their faith.

Remember the context: Paul is referring to those issues where the Bible is not explicitly clear, such as eating meat that might have come from a pagan market or was not kosher, drinking alcohol, or observing certain holidays.

15:1 – We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Who were the weak in faith? It was those who were more legalistic on the matters of discussion. They were called weak because they could not recognize the freedom that God has given us in our faith practices.

Likewise, I would call people who are legalistic and dogmatic about matters such as type of worship as weak in faith. And I have the Word of God to back me up!

Here in verse one, Paul includes himself when he writes that the strong in faith have an obligation to bear with the weak.

15:2 – Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.

This echoes what Paul said in the previous chapter. The neighbors he writes about were their fellow Christians – the ones weak in their faith. However, the principle is valid in all relationships.

This is a great way to live out Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourself.

15:3 – For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”^[a] ⁴ 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.

In verse three, Paul quotes from Psalm 69. Paul seems to be saying that since Christ was willing to suffer and be insulted for our sake, we, too, should be willing to sacrifice for others.

In verse four Paul is of course referring to what we call the Old Testament. In it, he says, we find teachings about endurance through times of trial. The implication is, again, is that we should be willing to endure for the sake of our weaker brothers and sisters in Christ.

15:5 – May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse five, Paul seems to offer up a little prayer, and he transitions back to the main point that he has been teaching on since the beginning of chapter 14.

Paul paints a beautiful picture of God. The God who gives endurance and encouragement. If your idea or picture of God is wrath and judgment, please invite the Holy Spirit – which is the very Spirit of God – into your life.

In fact, the word we have for encouragement is the word Jesus uses when he says that the Comforter – the Holy Spirit – will be given.

Verse six gets to the very purpose of the church – to glorify God with one voice.

Consider what Paul has been teaching about since the beginning of chapter 14. When our voices are arguing back and forth over the proper way to worship, the proper way to do church, we have lost our one voice and we certainly aren't glorifying God.

15:7 – Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Accept the Christian who chooses to worship differently than you.
Accept the Christian who chooses not to observe the same religious holidays or seasons as you.

Accept the Christian who chooses to drink wine in moderation.

Quit arguing and start praising and glorifying God!

Paul seems to switch topics in the next verse. He sort of goes back to the topic of several chapters prior. However, verse seven was sort of a transition to the glory of God. God's glory has been most visibly given through Jesus.

15:8 – For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews^[b] on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Remember, before Paul began writing about accepting one another regardless of various differences, he had been writing about Jesus' special relationship with the Jews – and the Gentiles.

In this passage, Paul tells us that Jesus came to earth to be a servant of the Jewish people, but also so that the Gentiles would glorify God for God's mercy.

Paul will now launch into several Old Testament quotes to show this to be true.

15:9b – As it is written:

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;

I will sing the praises of your name.” (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

¹⁰ Again, it says,
“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.” (Deut. 32:43)

¹¹ And again,
“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.” (Psalm 117:1)

¹² 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.” (Isaiah 11:10)

15:13 – 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.

This short prayer that Paul gives to the Church in Rome is often used today as a closing benediction. It is a powerful statement about what God can do in the hearts and minds of every Christian.

In verse five Paul called God the God of endurance and encouragement. Here, he calls God the God of hope.

Here in 2020, we wonder what we have to hope for in 2021. Let me tell you, the hope we find in God is the only lasting hope. Everything else is fleeting.

Not many people are overflowing with hope right now – but we should be!

The peace and joy we can receive from God is received because we are right with God. Sin no longer separates us from God. And, God has given us God’s very Spirit!

Good stuff!

15:14 – I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

This verse begins a new section of Paul’s letter. It’s likely that Paul had not yet met most of the Christians in Rome. He knew Priscilla and Aquila, and a few others. So, he had probably received several letters reporting about the activity of the church.

15:15 – Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the *gospel* of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul had written boldly to remind them of what they already knew. This is how I view preaching. Of course, some may learn something new, but for most folks who have been in church for any length of time, a sermon is often a reminder.

Having told them that he wrote as a reminder, Paul answers the question some may have had – who was this guy Paul to remind us?

Who he was was a man appointed by God to preach the good news of God, in particular to the Gentiles.

Paul's desire was that the Gentiles become sanctified – made holy. And as verse 16 tells us, the only way that that can happen is through the Holy Spirit.

15:17 – Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

Paul is not boasting in the flesh – or boasting of what he has done, as the next verse makes clear.

15:18 – 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— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

In verse 18 Paul shows us how Christians can be proud of their work while still being humble before God. Paul did not take credit for his accomplishments. Christ accomplished it all through him.

Galatians 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

Verse 19 tells us that whatever Paul has accomplished it has been through the power of the Holy Spirit.

15:20 – It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.

²¹ Rather, as it is written:

“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.”^[g]

²² This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul saw himself – as God did – as a first contact missionary. There is nothing wrong with building on another’s foundation – and it is necessary – but that was not his role.

In verse 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15. He sees his ministry as fulfilling those words – “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”

That passage in Isaiah 52 was pointing towards the Messiah, the suffering servant.

15:23 – But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Paul was missionary, and as such he had to raise money. Missionaries are still raising money today. We give to the Bowling’s in India. Soon, we will have a missionary family in the DR from our own church – it is my hope that we will support them in a very generous way, just as the Church in Antioch had supported Paul.

It’s biblical to support missionaries.

15:25 – Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they

owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

In his letters, Paul often urged his Gentile churches to give generously to help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Even though Paul has written in this letter that most Jews had rejected Christ, Paul sees the Gentiles as still indebted to them. It was through the Jews centuries long relationship with God that produced their scriptures. It was also through the Jews that the Messiah came.

15:28 – So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

Paul lived by the Spirit – and as such, he was confident that he was always standing in the will of God. So, he wrote that he will arrive in Rome in the full measure of the blessings of Christ.

15:30 – I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

I've often said that the one ministry in which we all can be involved in is the ministry of prayer. We especially should be in prayer for missionaries. They do, like Paul, often struggle.

They live on far less than we do, and less than they had been living on before they became missionaries.

They are far removed from family and friends – far removed from their support groups.

15:31 – Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, ³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul asks for their prayers, and he gives three specific requests.

First, he asks that he would be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. Then, he requests prayer that the offering would be favorably received.

Why wouldn't it be?

Because many of the Jewish Christians were not welcoming of the Gentiles, and some would see an offering from the Gentiles as an insult.

Of course, there were practical things to worry about – travelling with a large sum of money was dangerous.

Acts 21:17 tells us that they were received warmly (of course, things would go south for Paul from there).

His third prayer requests was that he would be able to visit them in Rome.

God answered those prayers, but not exactly in the manner in which Paul may have hoped for.

He was received warmly in Jerusalem. He was attacked by a murderous group of Jews, but was rescued by Roman soldiers.

And he did, indeed, make it to Rome after a couple of years in prison.

Chapter 16

Paul is wrapping up his letter, and he gives greeting and recommendations to a number of people. He begins with Phoebe.

16:1 – I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon^{[a][b]} of the church in Cenchreae. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Cenchreae was a seaport located near Corinth. Paul wrote this letter while in Corinth. Presumably, Phoebe delivered this letter to the church in Rome.

Her position in the church is translated in various ways. A servant, a deaconess. The word is the word we have been looking at on Sunday mornings – diakonos. Did she hold some form of leadership in the church? We can't say for sure, but it is likely.

The word diakonos came to be used for the official position of deacon and deaconess. Was it used in such a way at that time – we can't say definitively. However, she was the very first person mentioned and the person who delivered this letter, so she was most likely a person of importance.

Verse two says that she has been the benefactor of many. Other translations have 'great help.' The actual Greek word is prostatis meant some form of female guardian. So, while it's unclear what her actual role was, she had a title which meant she had a special role in the early church.

In verse three, Paul will have 16 sentences where he begins with 'greet.' While Paul had not yet been to Rome, he clearly knows quite a few of the Christians there.

16:3 – Greet Priscilla^[c] and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house.

He begins with Priscilla & Aquila. Priscilla is Prisca in the Greek, and is sometimes translated as such in the English. They were a married couple, and Priscilla is often mentioned first, which would have indicated an important role in the church, more so than her husband's.

Compared to some of the other people mentioned in this chapter, we know quite a bit about them. In Acts 18, we learn that Paul first met them in Corinth, and worked with them for a time in the trade of tent making.

Remember, tent making would have been more than a tent for overnight camping, they were houses for many.

Priscilla and Aquila had come to Corinth from Italy when the emperor had ordered the Jews out of Rome.

They became Christians and worked with Paul in establishing churches. In Acts 18 & 19, we learn that they traveled with Paul to Ephesus, and hosted a church in their home.

Acts 18 also tells us that having a good knowledge of Jesus, they tutored a young evangelist named Apollos. Apollos, many believe, was the author of the book of Hebrews.

Now, they were back in Rome. They likely returned following the death of the Emperor Claudius and the end of his ban on the Jews in the year 54.

In verse four, Paul writes that they risked their lives for him. Literally it says they risked their necks for him. We don't know when that exactly happened, but most likely in Ephesus when the riot described in Acts 19 took place.

We gather from the stories about Priscilla and Aquila that they were people of some means. In Ephesus they hosted a home church. In Rome, they also hosted a home church.

The wealthier people often had homes with at least one large or great room. These were wealthy people who welcomed slaves and the very poor into their homes. They probably fed many of them and cared for them in various ways.

Since Paul singles out a church that met in their home, it was likely that there were multiple home churches in Rome.

16:5b – Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

Paul describes Epenetus as the first convert in Asia. Literally, it says he was of the first fruits in Asia. This was probably in Ephesus. Scholars believe that he traveled to Rome with Priscilla and Aquila to help establish a church there.

16:6 – Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

Next, he sends greetings to Mary, or in the Greek, Mariam. Mariam, or Mary, was a common Jewish name. So, she may have been a Jewish convert. We don't know what she did, but her work impressed Paul.

16:7 – Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among^[d] the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

His next greeting is to Andronicus & Junia. Scholars believe that Junia, or Junias, was a woman's name, and that this is a second married couple in Paul's list.

They are described as fellow Jews, or kinsmen. The Greek word could be translated as relative, but most likely referring to their being Jewish. Adnronicus was a Greek name, so if he was a Jew he was what was called a God fearer, or a Hellenistic Jew.

He calls them fellow prisoners. Paul often spent time in prison for preaching the good news, and apparently, they did, as well, though we don't know where or when.

He writes that they were outstanding among or esteemed by the apostles. Were they called apostles? We can't say for sure – of so, we have a woman being called an apostle. At the least, the apostles held them in high regard.

They were Christians before Paul, and may have been part of the very birth of the Church on the first Pentecost.

16:8 – Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.

Next he mentions Ampliatus, someone else he calls beloved, or dear friend. We don't know anything else about him.

There are legends that say that this man was from the royal house of Rome. Perhaps a distant relative of emperor.

16:9 – Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

We don't know anything about these two men. We read – my dear friend Stachys. Literally it says one loved by me.

16:10 – Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

We know nothing about Apelles, other than that he has stood the test – some translations have been approved by Christ. The Greek for been approved also means to have withstood the test.

Next he greets the household of Aristobulus. This presents some possible interesting history. Many scholars believe that this man was the grandson of Herod the Great, and brother of King Herod Agrippa I.

Aristobulus dies in the year 47, before this was written. That would be why Paul does not send him greeting, but those who belong to his household.

Who belonged to his household? Certainly family members, but also slaves and servants.

Was Aristobulus a Christian, or just his household? It's very likely that he had been, or Paul would not have known of his household.

16:11 – Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

Herodian was an uncommon name for many outside of the family of Herod's. Paul had mentioned Aristobulus, a Herod family member. So, it is likely that here we have another Herod family member.

He then sends greetings to the in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. The way it is worded suggests that this man Narcissus was not a Christian, nor was everyone in his household.

It's not known if this man was the Narcissus who served Emperor Claudius, or not.

16:12 – Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

Nothing is known of these women. Legends say that they were slaves, or former slaves.

16:13 – Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

Some believe that this was the Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21. That Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Jesus.

16:14 – Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.

As Paul is wrapping up his letter, he now begins simply listing names instead of giving some quick commendation or description of each one. It's possible that these people were members of the same house church.

16:15 – Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.

Scholars believe that Philologus and Julia were a husband and wife team who had a house church in Rome.

16:16 – Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

Paul mentioned a holy kiss in several letters. In many parts of the world – until Covid, anyway – church members would greet one another with a holy kiss. It is simply a kiss on one or both cheeks.

16:17 – I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

Paul dictated his letters, and it seems that as he has drawn his letter to an end, some other matters have popped up into his mind.

Paul had seen divisions run through the church in Corinth, and here he warns them to keep away from people that would cause divisions.

Make no mistake about it – false teachers are good at it! They deceive the minds of naïve people. Now, we're not talking country bumkin naïve. Even educated people can be naïve in the things of Jesus.

Paul is quick to clarify that his warning about false teachers has nothing to do with their reputation.

16:19 – Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

16:20 – The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Paul had been warning them against false teachers. In verse twenty he seems to associate false teachers with the father of all lies, Satan.

Paul saying that God will crush Satan under your feet alludes to what passage of Scripture? Genesis 3:15.

16:21 – Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews.

Paul had sent specific greetings to people in Rome, now he sends greetings from others. Timothy, we should know well. Paul wrote letters to him, and we have two in the Bible.

Timothy joined Paul on Paul's second missionary journey, and their lives were intertwined in ministry for the remainder of Paul's life.

We don't know who Lucius was.

Jason may have been the Jason of Acts 17, who received Paul when he was in Thessalonica, and who received a great deal of trouble for doing so.

Sosipater is believed to be the man named Sopater in Acts 20. He was from Berea and joined Paul on his third missionary journey.

16:22 – I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

As I've taught before, Paul dictated his letters. A scribe – or amanuensis, (ah man u en sis) would write his words down.

Some have speculated that Paul had problems with his eyes, so someone else wrote for him. That's possible, but it was a common practice of that time for someone to write down the words for another as that person dictated the letter.

16:23 – Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.
Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

Three men named Gaius are mentioned in the New Testament. This one is probably the same one mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as a man he baptized in Corinth.

Paul is apparently staying at his house. Perhaps, by saying that the whole church here enjoys his hospitality, in was Gaius' practice to host Christians from out of town.

When we go to Mexico, pastors regularly give up their homes for the mission teams, and they stay elsewhere.

Erastus, as the director of public works, would have most likely been a Roman official. People from all levels of society would joyfully worship together.

Quartus, we know nothing about.

Some of your translations may have a verse 24 – Some manuscripts include here *May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.*

Why is this not in the more modern translations? Because it is not found in older manuscripts of the Bible. The thinking is that the older a manuscript, the more likely it is to be like the original.

It's not a big deal, as we have the same words in verse 20. Perhaps, some scribe looking from manuscript to the new copy simply copied twice in error.

Verse 25-27 is a one sentence doxology, or hymn of praise.

16:25 – Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel/good news, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ 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^[f] faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.