

A Commentary on the Letter of Paul to the Romans

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INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the *Letter of Paul to the Romans*. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Paul's letter. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our life group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of *Romans*. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

A few things need to be noted. There are occasional references to the original Greek words Paul used in a particular passage. Those Greek words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Greek. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the *New International Version* and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

The Greek language which Paul used to write his *Letter to the Romans* is a very precise and complex language, especially when it comes to verbs or action words. I refer at times to the tenses of Greek verbs in the commentary. Greek tenses are different from English verb tenses. English verbs most often refer to the timing of an action. Something happens in the past, present, or future. Greek tenses most often refer to the type of action. Unfortunately in our English translations that distinction is often lost. Thus the Greek present tense refers to continuous action in the present not simply an action that happens in the present. The aorist tense in Greek means a point action or an action that happens once and for all. Most English Bibles simply translate the aorist tense as a simple English past tense. We lose the impact of the aorist in English. The imperfect tense is a continuous action which happened in the past and not the present. The perfect tense in Greek is an action that happened in the past whose effects continue on into the present. It is most often translated in English using the helping verb to have. *I have spoken to him*. An aorist in English would be: *I spoke to him*. A present in English would be: *I am speaking to him*. An imperfect tense would be translated: *I was speaking to him*. The future tense in Greek is the closest to the English future and simply means an action that is yet to occur or it will occur. *I will speak to him*.

There are also verbal moods in Greek that work with the tenses to more precisely communicate the kind of action taking place. A verb may be in the indicative mood which the most common mood. The indicative is the mood of fact. *I threw the ball*. The subjunctive mood is the mood of contingency. *I might throw the ball*. The imperative mood is the mood of command. *Throw the ball!*

Finally there are two basic verbal voices in Greek. The first is the active voice which means the action is done by the subject of the sentence. *I threw the ball*. The passive voice means the action is done to the subject. *The ball was thrown by me*. All of this may seem complicated but Greek was the language in which the New Testament was written. The Holy Spirit had his

reasons and it helps to understand a little bit about Greek grammar so that we can better understand Paul's meaning in Romans. The Greek language gave him a very precise tool with which to communicate God's truth to the Roman Christians and to us. Paul chooses his words carefully!

SETTING:

As I note below in the commentary, Paul writes *Romans* in the winter of 57-58 from Corinth as he was getting ready to take the Gentile offering for the Jerusalem poor to Jerusalem. See *Acts 20:2-3*.

Paul had never visited Rome and it appears he wanted to use Rome as a base of operations for a new evangelistic work in the west of the Roman Empire, namely Spain. See *Romans 15:23-29*. Antioch had been his base in the east. *The Letter to the Romans* is his missionary manifesto introducing the Roman church to the apostolic gospel that Paul preached. He knew many in Rome as *chapter 16* details. He also knew some of the problems or struggles of the church as *chapters 12-15* indicate yet he writes mostly to detail his missionary theology. *Romans* is more systematic and overtly theological in its content unlike many of Paul's letters which are more practical in nature and reveal his theological thinking as answers to specific questions or issues facing a particular church.

OUTLINE OF ROMANS:

The following is a brief outline of the *Letter to the Romans* giving you an overview of how the letter is put together. It is taken from the *NIV Study Bible*. The theme of *Romans* is the righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

- I. Introduction (1:1-15)
- II. Theme Verse; the Righteousness of God (1:16-17)
- III. The Unrighteousness of All Mankind (1:18-3:20)
 - A. The Gentiles (1:18-32)
 - B. The Jews (2:1-3:8)
 - C. Summary: All People (3:9-20)
- IV. Righteousness Credited: Justification (3:21-5:21)
 - A. Through Christ (3:21-26)
 - B. Received by Faith (3:27-4:25)
 1. The principle established (3:27-31)
 2. The principle illustrated (4:1-25)
 - C. The Fruits of Righteousness (5:1-11)
 - D. Summary: Man's Unrighteousness Contrasted with God's Gift of Righteousness (5:12-21)
- V. Righteousness Conveyed: Sanctification (6:1-8:39)
 - A. Freedom from Sin's Tyranny (6:1-23)
 - B. Freedom from the Law's Condemnation (7:1-25)
 - C. Life in the Power of the Spirit (8:1-39)
- VI. God's Righteousness Vindicated: The Problem of Israel's Rejection (9:1-11:36)
 - A. The Justice of the Rejection (9:1-29)
 - B. The Cause of the Rejection (9:30-10:21)
 - C. Facts That Lesson the Difficulty (11:1-36)
 1. The rejection is not total (11:1-10)

- 2. The rejection is not final (11:11-24)
- 3. God's ultimate purpose (11:25-36)
- VII. Righteousness Practiced (12:1-15:13)
 - A. In the Body – the Church (12:1-21)
 - B. In the World (13:1-14)
 - C. Among the Weak and Strong Christians (14:1-15:13)
- VIII. Conclusion (15:14-33)
- IX. Commendation and Greetings (16:1-27)

A FINAL PERSONAL NOTE:

I hope and pray you will find this resource useful for your own study and also for your life group. I also hope that it will help grow your love and respect for God's Word, the Bible and help motivate you to study it more so that you may come to know its author, our Lord Jesus Christ!

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THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

1:1 - Paul uses the word *doulos* meaning slave, servant or bond-servant to describe his identity. It was one of his favorite words for himself in relationship to the Lord Jesus. He is also an apostle; meaning sent one, set apart for the gospel of God. The risen Lord Jesus had sent Paul on his mission to reach the Gentiles with the gospel on the Damascus Road some 20 years before Paul writes *Romans*. Paul's apostolic mission had been given to him by the Lord Jesus himself. He did not receive it from any human being or from the church in Jerusalem or the other apostles. It was this contention that allowed Paul to place himself in the circle of the apostles of the early church.

1:2-4 - Paul briefly outlines his gospel. The whole letter to the *Romans* will explain it in more detail but here he gives a brief summary. The gospel was promised beforehand by the prophetic Scriptures. Jesus in the *Gospel of Luke* and *Acts 1* emphasizes this. The prophets had foretold all that would happen to the Messiah that he would suffer and die and then rise again. It was one of the fundamental tenets of the faith that the prophets foretold the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God who was fully human, descended in direct line from David and by rite of succession inheriting his ancestor David's promise of a throne. He was also fully divine, being the very Son of God. He was shown to be God's Son by his resurrection from the dead accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is therefore Lord of all, Messiah and Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord!

1:5-6 - Paul says it was through the Messiah Jesus, the Lord of all that he had received the grace of salvation in Christ and his commission to be an apostle of that grace. He did not earn his salvation or commission; it was given to him directly by Jesus. His mission was to call a people from among the Gentiles to the "*obedience that comes from faith*". Literally the phrase in Greek reads: "*Through him we received grace and apostleship into obedience of faith, among all the*

nations on behalf of his name." "Obedience of faith" is a prepositional phrase in the genitive case in Greek, meaning faith's obedience or as the NIV translates the obedience that comes from faith. It originates through faith. Paul in *Romans* will contrast the Jewish Pharisee's way of salvation, personal works of righteousness to earn God's favor with the obedience of faith. This is not obedience to the Law that comes from human effort, trying harder to obey God. This is the obedience from the heart that is a byproduct of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The obedience of faith is what the Holy Spirit produces in us as he transforms our character as we walk in him. It enables us to be righteous not on our own but by the power of God. This is the power of lifechange that only God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit living in us can produce. It is a key tenet of Paul's gospel.

The Roman Christians are part of the people who belong to Jesus Christ. They were a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles and were one of the earliest churches to be founded outside of Jerusalem. Paul hints in *Romans 16* that Jews from Rome founded the church soon after Pentecost. Paul had become a Christian around 33, about three years after Jesus' death and resurrection. He greets Junia and Andronicus, fellow Jews he says were in Christ before he was and were outstanding among the apostles. There were Roman Jews at Pentecost and it is possible that Junia and Andronicus were two of those Jews who returned home and planted a church among the Jews in Rome. Later as the Spirit included the Gentiles in the gospel, the Jewish Christians in Rome began to reach out to the Gentiles in the city as well. By the time Paul writes to the Romans there is a thriving Jewish-Gentile church in Rome. As far as we know none of the twelve apostles founded it.

1:7 - Paul writes to the Roman church, to all who are loved by God and called to be saints, God's holy people. Paul writes in the winter of 57-58 from Corinth as he was getting ready to take the Gentile offering for the Jerusalem poor to Jerusalem. See *Acts 20:2-3*.

Paul had never visited Rome and *Romans* is his introduction to the church. He wanted to use Rome as a base of operations for his new work in the west of the Roman Empire, meaning Spain, just as Antioch had been his base in the east. *Romans* is his missionary manifesto introducing the Roman church to the gospel that he preached. He knew many in Rome as *chapter 16* details. Also his friends Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome from Ephesus hosting a church in their home. It is possible they had returned as Paul's advance team for his mission to Spain and the western empire. He knows some of the problems or struggles of the church as *chapters 12-15* indicate yet he writes mostly to detail his missionary theology. Thus *Romans* is more systematic and overtly theological in its content unlike many of Paul's letters which are more practical in nature and reveal his theological thinking as answers to specific questions or issues facing a particular church. *Romans* is about the gospel of God; the gospel that has given us grace and peace from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ!

1:8-13 - Paul says the Roman church and their faith were known all over the world. That is hardly surprising since Rome was the capital and the center of the Roman world. Plus people like Priscilla and Aquila had lived in Rome and been a part of the church there. They had helped Paul in both Ephesus and Corinth plant churches in those cities as well. They would have been able to share about Rome and the Christians in the great city with other believers around the empire.

Paul prays for the Roman church constantly. We know from *Romans 16* he knew many people there which is probably the reason he prays for them on a regular basis, even though he had never been to Rome or planted the church there.

Paul had wanted to come to Rome for a long time. Now at last he can see the way is open. He has one more task to complete in the east, delivery of the Gentile offering for the Jerusalem poor. Then he can come to Rome. Little did he know at the time of his writing that it would be two years before he arrived there and not in the way that he had planned.

Spiritual gift here is not *charismata* but encouragement to them and to Paul, even though he uses the word *charisma*. In Greek the words *charisma* and *pneumatikon* are separated by the dative form of you (literally: *charisma – gift to you pneumatikon - spiritual*). In *Romans 12* he uses the word *charismata* in the plural while here in *1:11* it is in the singular. The same is true for *1 Corinthians 12*. That is why Paul is probably not talking about a specific grace-gift of the Holy Spirit but speaking in more general terms about encouraging the Roman church and he being encouraged by their faith as well.

Paul longs to preach the gospel in Rome as he has in the cities in the east in order to share in the harvest of the gospel. His plans however are not just to preach in Rome. Paul wants to head into the western part of the empire, specifically Spain and evangelize there where no one has yet preached. Thus *Romans* is Paul's introduction to the gospel he preaches so that the Roman church may support him like the church in Antioch supported him in the eastern Mediterranean.

1:14-17 - Paul says he is obligated to preach the gospel to Greeks and non-Greeks alike. Paul uses the word *barbarois*, barbarians. The word is descriptive, meaning those who do not speak Greek or are part of the Greek world and not pejorative. It is not meant to be derogative. There would have been many in Spain and the west where Paul wanted to go who would have been classified as barbarian. He is also obligated to the wise and the foolish. The word he uses for foolish is literally without mind, meaning uneducated. This is an infrequent word for foolish in Greek and is different from the terms he uses for foolish and foolishness in *1 Corinthians 1*. Here he contrasts the educated and learned with the uneducated. The gospel knows no boundaries but is for all. That is why he says he is eager to preach it in Rome and beyond.

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the very power of God for salvation. This is the theme verse of *Romans*. The gospel is the Word of God that carries the power of God to accomplish what it declares! That power is appropriated into a person's life by faith in Christ. The power of the gospel makes a person both right with God and carries the ability to also change their behavior and make them act and live with God's righteousness. We are made right *WITH* God and we are made to live right *BY* God all through faith in Jesus Christ.

The good news of God is for the Jew first, because it comes to the world through the promised Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. But it is also for the Gentiles because the Messiah will bring the Gentiles to God as well. That was foretold in the prophets, especially *Isaiah*. Paul sees his mission as fulfilling the prophecies of the Messianic Age when the Gentiles will come to God.

This righteousness of God is not earned or given by any merit from us. It does not come through the Law of Moses or human good works. It comes wholly as a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. *Habakkuk 2:4* is the great proof text for Paul; *the righteous will live by faith*. The Christian life is lived by faith from the beginning to the end. We are saved by faith and we are sanctified by faith and we will be glorified by faith!

1:18-20 - The gospel is a sign of the end times and even now the wrath of God against human sin is being revealed. It is part of the already-not yet pattern of the Kingdom of God. While we are

waiting for the final climactic revelation of God's wrath at Jesus' coming, Paul says it is already breaking into history just as God's salvation and righteousness are breaking into history through the revelation of the gospel! This is the crisis of faith theologian Karl Barth describes.

Human wickedness suppresses the truth about God among human beings. Intelligent design in creation makes the fact of God's existence plain but our sin and wickedness deny that which is obvious in nature. God has put enough of himself into his creation to give humankind clear evidence of his existence and power. There is no excuse for being an atheist or agnostic. It is not legitimate doubts but sin that leads people to these conclusions.

What can be known through natural revelation in creation are God's eternal power and his divine nature. In other words creation itself testifies to the fact that God is greater than creation and is separate from it. The mistake the pagans and other animistic peoples make is thinking that nature itself is a god and is to be worshipped. What nature cannot tell us is the mystery of God's love but it does reveal God's greatness. That is why in order to truly know God *HE* must reveal himself to us personally because through nature we can know he exists but we cannot know him personally.

Paul here leaves a small door ajar for those who never hear the gospel. If someone observing nature, who had never heard of God or the gospel, worships God as God does God accept them into heaven through his grace? I think the answer is yes, although that is still tenuous. Paul's argument is human beings know God is real and deserves to be worshipped but instead of giving him glory as God they invent new gods and turn to idolatry. There may be some in heaven among those who never heard the gospel but they will be few. The vast majority will have rejected God as God and worshipped something else in his place.

1:21-23 - Paul argues that all people know instinctively at some level that God exists because there is enough of himself in his creation to reveal his existence. The problem is people deny the obvious evidence of God. So evolutionists call Intelligent Design a religious fantasy and substitute the even greater fantasy of mindless, plan-less evolution in its place. At least Intelligent Design deals with the evidence of order and hypothesizes an intelligence behind the universe because the evidence points overwhelmingly to a design for the universe and especially life. Secular evolution simply says, no there is no designer and all the design you see, which is real was a result of mindless chance! That is a far greater intellectual fantasy than the theory that if there is a design in nature there must have been a designer.

Why does this denial in the face of all the evidence of creation take place? Paul says it is because of sin. People know God exists but will not worship him as God because to do so means they would have to submit to him and he would be in charge and they would not! So people who claim to be wise become fools, exchanging the glory of God for man-made idols and nature worship. There is a downward spiral here as Earl Palmer former pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle noted; a descent into idolatry eventually worshipping what we fear the most, snakes.

People's thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened because of this refusal to submit to God. The heart is the seat of the will and emotion in Greek thought. The mind is the seat of reason. Once their reason was corrupted by sin and wickedness then the will and emotions followed. The great Reformer John Calvin called this total depravity; all parts of the human person are marred by sin. Even human reason is corrupted and so science will not give human beings the answers they seek nor will philosophy because our reasoning powers have been depraved by sin and any answers we get are fundamentally flawed! People deny the

evidence and end up embracing illogic because their sin has clouded their reason. Human reason then is no guarantee of truth because it too has been corrupted by sin and rebellion against our rightful Creator. Only the personal revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ can save us. The philosopher and the scientist cannot trust their reason because sin has already corrupted it and it will lead them astray. They are victims of a spiritual disease they deny exists but which has trapped them nonetheless in folly and destruction. For all their rational thought they are trapped in sin and separated from the greatest intelligence in the universe, their Creator, God.

1:24-27 - Refusing to believe in God and worship him as God, trapped in their rebellion and sin, God gave people over to the natural consequences of sin working itself out in their bodies and behavior. The phrase "*God gave them over*" means to hand over to another, to give into another's power or custody, to permit or allow. Paul says this handing over is the revelation of God's judgment for human sin breaking into the world in the present age. This is the wrath of God being revealed so that there will be no excuse before God. When people reject God enough God takes away any protection or restraints and allows their sin to take full effect. This is his wrath revealed in anticipation of the final judgment. He does it so that the revelation of the gospel will also have its full effect. God in his holiness reveals his wrath against human sin and in his love reveals the gospel of the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Both are present in the world in these last days so that the human race will be without excuse before the judgment seat of God and those God has chosen might be saved to eternal life with him.

One of the chief areas where human sin and idolatry manifest themselves is in sexual sin and the perverting of human sexuality. It is one of the most visible places in our lives where our sinful desires run amok and God's wrath of allowing people to express the implications of their rejection of God is made known. The conclusion one can reach from Paul's argument is the test of how much God's wrath is being poured out on any society is to look at their sexual mores and behavior. The further they have slipped into depravity the greater the revealing of God's wrath against that society. Sexual depravity in itself is the greatest evidence of the abandoning of the rightful worship of the Creator and a culture's descent into idolatry and rebellion. The result is that people end up degrading their bodies with one another.

Paul then singles out homosexual practice as clear evidence of the descent into sin and rebellion and the rejection of God. Homosexual practice is a result of sin and God's wrath in the world. It is in not a result of God's creation! There is nothing affirming about homosexual practice. It is in fact according to God, unnatural, degrading and unclean! There is no biological reason for it nor are our bodies designed for it. It is a sign of God's eschatological wrath being revealed to the human race even now! Those who have homosexual feelings and desires deserve all our compassion and help to remain celibate or to abandon homosexual behavior and if possible through the grace of God be transformed back to the heterosexual person God designed them to be. But in no way should the church condone or bless homosexual behavior. Paul makes it clear here in *Romans 1* it is against nature and against God and is a result and manifestation of human sin!

People are so caught up in their rebellion against God they exchange the truth of God for a lie. *Isaiah 44:20* says: "*He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'*" Isaiah is speaking of the lie of an idol and the delusion of thinking idolatrous and sinful behavior that results from it is acceptable to God. Paul says when the denial of God and the rebellion against God become great enough God abandons people to their own sinful and perverted desires and allows them to suffer the

consequences of their sin unabated. He says that is why God allows the consequences of homosexual behavior to manifest themselves, including rampant STD's and AIDS. Even now after so many have died of AIDS and it is still so prevalent among homosexual men, our society denies the wickedness and perversion of it. The CDC won't come out against the behavior for fear of being labeled homophobic. There is nothing wholesome about lesbian or homosexual actions and sex. Paul declares it unnatural! It denies God's creation of us as male and female and people participate in it to their destruction.

Therefore God responds to people's sin and rebellion by allowing people to carry the moral freedom that God grants us to absurd limits. Evil becomes the good. As Isaiah says in *Isaiah 5:20*: *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*

1:28-32 - Human sin and rebellion reaches a point where people abandon even the knowledge of God so God gives them over to their sin, to a depraved mind. A depraved mind means a mind that is totally controlled by sin, rebellion and rejection of God. That depravity leads them to do what ought not to be done; unbridled sin and evil without restraint. This is the exact opposite of the transformed mind of *Romans 12:2*. What happens when human beings are conformed to the world's standards? Rebellion and every form of wickedness are the result. This is where it leads, make no mistake!

Paul then gives us a laundry list of sin that God's wrath no longer holds back in *verses 29-31*. Every kind of wickedness is manifested in people. Greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice; do we see those kinds of behaviors in America today? Yes!!! People become gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful. They even invent ways of doing evil and they disobey their parents. Paul understands how critical it is that children obey their parents, but our society is so sick morally we read his statement and think how quaint! The character of people abandoned to depravity is they are senseless; they have taken leave of all restraint and common sense. They are foolish and stupid. They are faithless; they believe in nothing other than themselves and their own desires; they are their own god. The Greek word means to break all covenants, including with God and with their spouses and families. It is the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness. Heartless; they care for no one and have lost the ability to have compassion on anyone. They are without natural affection for anyone, unloving and inhuman. They are the very opposite of people in community. Ruthless; they are without mercy for anyone or anything. Their hearts are completely cold and evil. In the end they reflect the character of Satan. One sees evidence of these kinds of behaviors and attitudes all over our society. We are in deep trouble because the wrath of God is being revealed in America today! One can no longer say *IF* we don't repent it will be revealed. It is here already!

When God gives people over to a depraved mind he allows people to bear the consequences of their sin and rebellion. His grace is removed and the restraints are withdrawn. What you have left is total rebellion against God. The ultimate sign of God's wrath in people and a depraved mind is that though people know the sin they commit deserves God's punishment and death they not only do it they approve of those who do and encourage others to commit the same sins as well. It is like Satan declaring in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "*All good to me is lost, evil be thou my good*".

Chapter 2:

2:1-4 - Paul says no human being is in position to cast judgment on another because we all sin; we all do the very same things we judge others for doing. We are therefore hypocrites. God however is not a hypocrite because God's judgment is based on truth; truth that is a completely accurate and impartial assessment of our thoughts and actions. God's truth is based on moral truth rooted and grounded in God's character. Therefore it is truth which is timeless and absolute. We are not timeless and absolute so when we judge someone yet also sin we are liable to judgment as well. We are in no position to pass judgment, yet God continues to treat sinners with kindness and patience. God is a tolerant God. Jesus says in *Matthew 5:45* God sends the rain and the sun on the just and the unjust. God gives everyone time to see their sin and repent. His kindness to us every day is designed to lead us to repentance. Every day God gives us life and breath. Everything is a gift from him.

2:5-11 - God's righteous absolute judgment was part of Paul's preaching. God has a day when he will finally judge the human race and Jesus is his representative by virtue of his cross and resurrection. The one who died to save the human race from sin will also be the one who judges the human race for its sin. Paul echoes the Old Testament in calling that day the day of God's wrath, the Day of the Lord. God's absolute righteous judgment will be revealed on that day and no one will be able to argue against it. God's case will be air-tight against us. The evidence will be overwhelming and we will know our guilt before him without any doubt at all, let alone a reasonable one. There will be no mitigating circumstances. No one will be able to stand before God on that day in their own righteousness for we will all be condemned as sinners and rebels before God, deserving death.

The difficulty in this passage is in *verse 7*. Paul sounds like he is supporting salvation based on good works. He says for those who by persistence, literally patience or perseverance, seek glory, honor and immortality God will give eternal life. Those who act selfishly and follow their own evil desires and reject the truth will experience only God's wrath against their sin. He goes on to say there will be trouble and distress for every human being who sins, to the Jew and the Gentile. And there will be glory and honor for every human being who does good; first the Jew and then the Gentile. There are no double standards here. Jews and Gentiles will be judged alike by what they have done. However, Paul will argue in *chapter 3* that no one does what is good because there is no one who is righteous, because all sin and fall short of the glory of God. I think this is a straw man argument for Paul. No one will be able to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and argue their case before him that they ought to be judged righteous by what they have done.

The other point he is making here is that being a Jew and being judged by your good works carries no advantage. There will be righteous Gentiles who will have a more favorable judgment before God than some Jews. The Jews thought they had all the advantages because they were God's chosen people. However, God will judge everyone individually and not corporately like he did Israel in the Old Testament. Israel as a nation will not come before the judgment seat of God. Every individual Jew will have to face Jesus Christ their Messiah and judge! At the last judgment God will play no favorites!

Paul also introduces a theme here he will develop further in the rest of *Romans*; true faith produces a changed life. The fruit of repentance is good works. When one submits to Jesus as Lord he changes us. We no longer stay the same. We are transformed by God into a person who reflects God's character.

2:12-16 - All who sin will be found guilty and judged. They will perish, meaning be lost, be destroyed, die, whether they had the Law of God or not. The key is not whether people hear the Law but rather do they do it. This was Jesus' argument in *Matthew 7* at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who hear his words and do them will build their life-house on the rock and when the storms and floods of life come it will stand. Some Pharisee Jews in Paul's day had argued that the Jews were saved merely because God had given them the Law and it was read every Sabbath and provided them salvation. Paul explodes that argument here. Obedience is hearing and doing the Law of God. And obedience to the Law is what makes one righteous before God not merely hearing it. The implication is one Paul will flesh out later in *Romans*. The Law carries no power by itself to transform us. It is impotent to change our hearts. It can only point out our sin, not make us righteous.

Paul then argues that Gentiles have a built in moral conscience when they do good. They understand the Law's moral requirements even though they live without the Law. The Law is written on their hearts or their conscience. Sometimes they are affirmed by their hearts and sometimes condemned. Paul is arguing that no one, Jew or Gentile, is without a moral sense and is thereby condemned of their sin before God. Our own conscience finds us guilty even if we don't know God. When the Day of Judgment comes and God reveals all our deeds before him our own consciences will condemn us before Jesus. No one will walk away from the judgment of God even if they have never heard the gospel uncondemned. We will all know our guilt before a holy and righteous God.

Paul's argument for the Law of Conscience, God's moral Law written on our hearts, is the second chief evidence of God to those who have never heard the gospel. God has put enough of himself in creation for those with eyes to see he is God and deserves to be worshipped. God has also put a moral sense within every human being so that we will all be condemned before God on Judgment Day whether we ever knew God or not. C.S. Lewis argues in *Mere Christianity* that the moral consistency between cultures concerning what is held as evil is a sign of God's presence in all cultures. Murder, stealing, adultery etc. are consistently wrong in any culture one studies. Lewis argues this is evidence of what Paul is speaking about here in *Romans 2*. God will hold those who have never heard the gospel accountable before him both because of the evidence of himself in creation and the evidence of himself and his Law within their own consciences. There is no one who will be able to claim ignorance before Jesus Christ when he judges the world. It will all be laid bare when Jesus returns to judge the human race!

2:17-24 - Paul now indicts his Jewish brothers and sisters. Having been a Pharisee he knew the Jewish attitude towards the Gentiles. The Jews considered themselves superior morally and spiritually to the Greeks because they had the Law of Moses. Through the Law they believed they knew the will of God. They considered themselves moral guides for the nations and teachers of God's light for those who lived in darkness. They saw others as infants and themselves as adults because the Gentiles were without the Law and Israel's task was to teach the world God's Law and will. Paul uses a somewhat sarcastic tone in these verses but the reality is they were true. This was the Jewish attitude toward the Gentiles when it came to morality and knowing God. They *WERE* the chosen people. It was their mission from God to tell the world who God was and how he wanted people to live. They did have the light of God's Word and the Gentiles did live in darkness apart from God.

But, for all their moral superiority the Jews are indicted before God by their own behavior. They have all the advantages of knowing God and his will but they do the same things

the Gentiles do; steal, commit adultery, and rob temples. The very ones who brag about having the Law and knowing it don't follow it! In fact who can keep the Law of God perfectly? No one! Paul quotes two prophets in support; *Isaiah & Ezekiel*. *Isaiah 52:5* says, “and all day long my Name is constantly blasphemed.” *Ezekiel 36:22* says, “but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.” Paul essentially combines both quotes in support of his argument. Yet the combination does reflect the sense of both prophets. Jesus intensified the Law's standards in *Matthew 5*. He intensified the Law's reach from deeds to motives as well. Paul quotes the prophets but it is also possible he had Jesus' words in mind. The bottom line is the Jews are indicted before God even though they have the Law because they don't fulfill it; they disobey it.

2:25-29 - The Jews believed circumcision, the sign of the covenant with Abraham, was a sign of their salvation and inclusion within the people of the covenant. Paul argues that it only has value if one obeys the Law. If you break it then circumcision does nothing for you. He poses the issue of a moral pagan. What if someone without circumcision keeps the commandments; will not that person be regarded as if he or she was circumcised? By their very actions they will condemn any Jew who is circumcised but disobeys the Law of God! Paul is talking about moral pagans here. This is in contrast to the end of *chapter 1* and those with depraved minds whom God has handed over to their rebellion, who already experience the wrath of God against sin.

Paul concludes his argument here in *chapter 2* by raising the question, what does it mean to be a Jew? Is it merely racial, one physically descended from Abraham and Jacob? Or is it something internal and spiritual? Paul says to be a true Jew is a matter of the heart. Circumcision is something the Spirit does in our hearts even though it has a physical sign in our bodies. This is probably a Hellenistic Jewish argument that Paul believed in and preached, because from this idea, you are led to Gentiles becoming proselytes. It is Biblical because it is founded on the Old Testament prophets, especially *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* who both talked about being circumcised in the heart. Without understanding being a Jew as a spiritual idea Judaism would have stayed a strictly racial religion and only those descended from Jacob would have been eligible for entrance into God's people. By Paul's day that was not the case for there were many Gentile proselytes who had become full Jews. If being a Jew is truly a matter of the heart, then given the right conditions anyone could become a Jew. The seeds of the gospel of faith in Jesus are here!

Chapter 3:

3:1-4 - If the Jews are caught in sin just as much as the Gentiles and their supposed moral superiority disappears why be a Jew? Why be circumcised? Paul raises a very good question. His answer focuses on the Word of God. If knowing God and having a relationship with him is the greatest thing to which a human being can aspire, then having the very words of God is a huge blessing and advantage in that pursuit. That was the major advantage the Jews had over the Gentiles. God had given his Word to them! Yet they disobeyed, ignored and twisted it!

Paul then asks if those who had God's Word disobeyed it does that prove God is unfaithful for giving them his Word? No, God is faithful even though everyone else turns out to be a liar. He is just and true. It is we human beings that sin and are fickle. Paul highlights the tension between God's sovereignty and faithfulness versus human sin and disobedience. God's promises are absolute yet our responses to his promises are not. Sometimes we obey God and sometimes we disobey. Our trajectory as human beings is away from him into sin. This tension always exists when the sovereign eternal God intersects human history and individual human

beings. God is always faithful and just but human beings are still individually free and responsible before God. He does not remove our freedom even while always staying true to his Word.

3:5-8 - Paul uses the following logic: I am doing God a favor, helping him with my sin to gain glory for himself through showing his grace, so why am I being judged? Isn't God being unfair? If his glory is the greatest good and my sin helps him get glory, what's the problem? The problem is God would then be untrue to his own character and deny his own righteousness and holiness! Why judge the world at all if that were the case? But we know that God will judge the world. Paul argues that God already has in the cross of Jesus Christ and we have all been found guilty and deserving death. It is at the cross that God's holiness and righteousness perfectly intersect with God's love and mercy. Paul is moving toward that revelation.

Some of Paul's enemies had used this argument of God being unfair against Paul as if he were teaching that sin didn't matter because of God's forgiveness so why not sin. His enemies separated justification from sanctification and did not understand the whole work of salvation in a person's life. We are saved for transformation. It is not an optional process but the continuation of the process of salvation. Plus they were arguing from a false premise, that the Law had the power to both save and transform us. As Paul will show in the following verses, the Law has only the power to condemn us and show us how far we have to go to be righteous before God. It has no power to change us! We need more than the written Word of God to be saved. We need a relationship with the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ. Paul is pressing his readers towards the revelation of God's righteousness in Jesus.

3:9-19 - Paul brings his argument to a conclusion. Even though the Jews have the advantage of God's Word, when it comes to sin they have no advantage at all because all sin, whether Jew or Gentile and therefore all deserve punishment. The entire human race is separated from God by sin.

To drive his point home Paul gives a set of proof texts using the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) as his source. Paul shows a remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures here. He must have had huge amounts committed to memory because you didn't carry around a Bible back in his day it would have been too big and heavy! In any synagogue you would have had only one copy of the scrolls of the Scriptures. It is possible that he had access in Corinth to a Septuagint to check his sources but we do not know. It is more likely that this was all from memory!

The proof texts in these verses are mostly from the *Psalms* and at least one passage from *Isaiah*. They show that there are no righteous human beings before God. Paul is using righteousness here in the sense of perfect righteousness, a holy righteousness that allows someone to stand before God on their own. All are guilty. All far short. Compared to another person I might be righteous. Compared to God I am a sinner and there is absolutely nothing I can do to change that status on my own!

The Law is good for all people everywhere but it especially speaks to those who are bound to follow it, namely God's covenant people the Jews. The Law holds the Jewish people accountable to God for their actions and under the Law they are guilty of breaking it. Paul's logical conclusion therefore is good works done by following the Law cannot merit salvation. The Law is powerless to save me; it can only increase my knowledge of sin! Therefore no one will be saved by following the Law. Paul has just indicted the entire Jewish race and especially

his Pharisee brothers and sisters. They passionately believed this was the way to earn God's favor and heaven. It was the view he held before he met Jesus on the Damascus Road (See *Acts 9*). Jesus had already shown the fallacy of this position in the gospels especially in his parables to the Pharisees. Paul now agrees with Jesus and supports his conclusions.

3:21-26 - The two little words at the beginning of *verse 21*, "*but now*", declare the decisive shift in the plan of God to save humanity. This is the revealing of the New Covenant in the Messiah of Israel who will also be the Savior of the entire human race. The righteousness of God has been revealed; the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the Law, though both the Law and the Prophets foretold it. The Law declared God's righteousness but is powerless to save me. Jesus *IS* God's righteousness and I become rightly related to God through faith in him; through receiving his forgiveness for me and surrendering and trusting my life to him as Lord. God returns through Christ to the covenant with Abraham and his relationship with God by faith. Thus God fulfills the promise he made to him that the entire human race would be blessed through Abraham. The blessing comes through Jesus, the Messiah, just as the Scriptures had promised.

Redemption means we have been set free and emancipated from the guilt, power and consequences of our sins. It has all been taken away by Jesus' death on the cross. His death is a complete punishment and sacrifice for all sin for all time. The Greek word Paul uses here means propitiation or mercy seat. Where before God met the High Priest on behalf of Israel at the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, so now God meets the entire human race at the cross where the eternal High Priest presents himself as the atoning sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God for human sin.

Grace means no cost to us because God paid the price in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross! To reject God's payment and grace is to be left in our own righteousness before God and Paul has already shown that cannot save us! There is no other way to be right with God other than through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross! God is patient now with all people in order that he might give them time to repent and be saved by receiving his gift of forgiveness and grace in Jesus. The cross of Jesus is the place in history where the mercy and grace of God intersect with the holiness and righteousness of God. God must punish sin; it must be paid for. God loves his creatures and does not desire them to be separated from him forever. He wants to forgive us. The cross is God's way to satisfy both parts of God's character and plan. The price is paid; the way is clear. God redeems us and forgives us through Jesus Christ our Lord! Praise his name!

3:27-31 - If we are wholly saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ where is our ground to boast before God of our own righteousness? It is obliterated by the sacrifice of Jesus. All grounds for human boasting before God are removed. We are justified before God by faith alone, *sola fide* as the Reformers said! Faith not works is the way to salvation. Therefore there is only one God who justifies Jews and Gentiles by faith in Jesus alone, *solus Christus*! The Law cannot save me only the grace of God in Jesus can make me right with God.

Paul hints at the New Covenant from *Jeremiah 31* that God will change our hearts from within and not by the external code of the Law. God's desire is still to have a people for himself who will love and obey him from the heart. The Old Covenant through the Law could not accomplish this. The New Covenant through faith in Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy

Spirit will. The Law failed; grace will not. Thus he will say in *Romans 8:4* that we who walk in the Spirit will fulfill the just requirements of the Law, not by works but by faith.

Chapter 4:

4:1-8 - Paul uses Abraham as a test case for justification by faith over against good works. He quotes *Genesis 15:6* that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him or reckoned to him as righteousness. God made Abraham righteous through faith. Paul then points out the fallacy of a works based righteousness. When someone works for something their wages are credited to them not as a gift but as an obligation. Works salvation would make God obligated to us to pay us what we deserved and had earned if we indeed could have earned it. Yet God is obligated to no one! He is in no one's debt! The Creator owes the creature nothing. It is totally the other way around!

He then uses a quote from David in *Psalms 31* for support arguing that David agrees with the principle that we are justified before God by faith apart from works. *Psalms 31* says blessed are they whose sins God forgives and does not count against them. Paul says this is evidence that God justifies the wicked through a person's trust in God alone without any reference to good works. His faith is credited to them as righteousness, just like Abraham.

4:9-12 - Paul is moving towards justification by faith for all who believe in Jesus whether Jew or Gentile. He asks if God's crediting Abraham as righteous happened before or after he was circumcised? It was before. Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith. This has been used as an argument for infant baptism. A child is baptized as a seal of the righteousness of faith in Christ. The fallacy is Abraham believed then was circumcised and sealed; an infant does not.

Abraham can justifiably be called the Father of Faith for believing God and receiving the promise by faith. He is the first example of someone who is justified by his faith before God apart from his works because neither was he circumcised when he believed or had the Law to follow!

4:13-15 - Paul says it was not through the Law that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob received the promise but through faith and the righteousness that comes by faith. If one could receive the promise through keeping the Law then the promise is worthless because God said it comes through faith. Furthermore God made the promise before he gave Israel the Law!

What can the Law do? The Law brings wrath because without Law there is no understanding and knowledge of our transgression. It is a double whammy too because if I think I can be justified by the Law it grows self-righteousness and pride in me whose reward is God's judgment and wrath! Our culture has abandoned the Ten Commandments and so does not understand its own sin! It sees nothing wrong with what God has labeled evil! Yet God's Law has been given and his will has been revealed. The whole human race is accountable to God's Law and therefore judged by it.

4:16-17 - Paul's conclusion? The promise comes by faith. God's promise of justification before him comes by grace through faith in God so that all those who have faith whether Jew or Gentile may be justified and be heirs with Abraham of the promise of God. Abraham therefore is the father of faith and the father of all who believe. He is the model person who believed God and trusted him to keep his promise. Therefore he is the father of many nations as the Scriptures

proclaim and not just the father of the Jews. That means that Jews and Gentiles can be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ!

God calls things that are not as though they were. He creates something out of nothing as he did the universe. Why should we be surprised then when God can justify a sinner? He creates out of nothing something new; a righteous, holy person before himself. He does not need raw material with which to work. He speaks a Word in the gospel and a new creation takes shape. God gives life to the dead!

4:18-25 - Abraham believed God in hope, even though from a human point of view he had no cause for hope. All he had was the promise of God, and he believed him! God had said his offspring would be as the stars of the heavens and Abraham trusted the promise. Abraham knew that he was old and past the age of fathering children. He knew Sarah's womb was barren and she could not conceive, yet his faith led him to trust God that somehow Sarah would have a son by Abraham.

Faith is trusting God that he has the power to do what he promises. Faith is acting as if the promises of God are true. That is what Abraham did. That is why he could even offer up his own son to God when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac. He knew God would not finally break his Word that Isaac would be the one who inherited the promise and if God had to resurrect Isaac he would because God always keeps his promises. He is the Promise Keeper!

When Abraham believed God despite his circumstances; when he placed God's promise to him above all things in his life and believed it God credited that trust to him as righteousness. Abraham became righteous in God's sight through his faith. That promise was not just for Abraham but for all those who put their trust in God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead.

Jesus was raised for our justification. God raised the victim and overcame our crime against him. Jesus is alive not dead. The resurrection validates his death as a death for us. Without it Jesus is a dead Jewish martyr and our sins remain unpaid for. With it the curse he bore on the tree becomes our curse that he took upon himself because he was innocent and had broken no Law. The curse of the Law is paid in full because Jesus died for us on the cross and God raised him from the dead to prove his death was for us! The resurrection is the key!

This was the overwhelming flash of insight Paul had on the Damascus Road when the risen Jesus met him. It was the only logical conclusion left to him to explain how Jesus, the cursed one, could be alive. It was at that moment that the tumblers clicked into place and the full implications of the gospel began to be clear to him. It would take him a decade to work out all the details but the essential elements of the cross and the resurrection were given to him by the Lord Jesus that day. He is risen and he is our Lord and Savior! Jesus is alive and sin is paid for!

Chapter 5:

5:1-5 - Paul brings his argument about justification by faith to its logical conclusion; therefore, since... We have been justified through faith. Justified is an aorist passive participle in Greek so one could translate it, having been justified. The passive voice emphasizes the fact that no good works of our own justified us before God. It is wholly God's doing. We merely receive the benefits of what God has done in our lives by faith in Jesus Christ. We are justified with God and have peace with him. We are reconciled to him and are no longer enemies deserving judgment. We are now his children and heirs with Christ of his Kingdom. We stand in grace. Theologian Karl Barth said our standing in grace is like standing in the air where we have no possibility of being. From a human point of view it is impossible. But nothing is impossible with God!

Paul knows it is not just our standing before God that justification has brought us. Our present life as well is radically altered. Even our suffering in this world is transformed. We struggle to make sense out of hard times in our lives. We often ask why is this happening to me? What is the purpose of it all? Paul understands how justification by faith has changed even our suffering. Paul could rejoice in his sufferings because he knew the outcome and what they produced in him. God used even his difficult times to transform him and change him. He was certain of that because of the Holy Spirit in him. The Spirit started the process in him begun in suffering that changed his character and ended in hope. That hope does not disappoint us. Literally the word means to shame. Hope doesn't shame us as something false because it is grounded in God's love for us that we know through the Holy Spirit. In fact knowing and experiencing the love of God in our hearts is one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit in us. The hope we have in Christ is another!

The Greek word for "*poured out*" means to pour out a drink offering on the altar. That which is poured out is always poured out from above something. *Joel* speaks of God pouring out the Holy Spirit from heaven in the last days. Paul probably has that idea in mind here in *Romans 5*. The verb is a perfect passive indicative in Greek meaning God has poured out the Holy Spirit upon us in an event in the past and the effects are still going on now in our lives. From the point of view of God's plan of salvation the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers at Pentecost. From the standpoint of the individual believer the Holy Spirit is poured out on our lives the moment we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. When we decide to confess Jesus as Lord the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and one of the first things he does in us is to convince us of God's love for us and help us experience that love. He also produces hope through our sufferings which produce perseverance and character in us, which finally lead to hope. Thus in experiencing the presence of God in our suffering it leads to hope that never shames us because we know God loves us. We know he loves us through the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts!

In the first five verses of *chapter 5* Paul has highlighted faith, hope and love; the three cardinal virtues of the Christian life. All of them originate in God and are results of his work in us.

5:6-8 - Christ died for the ungodly! Paul has already shown that all people sin, all are in rebellion against God. There is none righteous, no not one. Christ died for them, the unrighteous who did not deserve salvation and could not earn it. We were powerless to save ourselves so that is when Christ died for us. In God's economy it was just the right time. From God's perspective the conditions were right. Only our own arrogance can object to God's timing and method in sending his Son to save the world when he did.

Paul speculates that there might be a situation where someone would die for a righteous person, meaning a good person from the world's point of view. Paul could imagine that scenario. There are times when a soldier will die for his comrades or a police officer will die protecting someone, but Paul rightly notes those times are rare in human experience. Jesus died for sinners like us! Jesus died for people who were already condemned to death by God's justice.

Jesus' death on the cross justifies us before God and reconciles us to God. We then appropriate Christ's work in our lives through faith in him. But Jesus' cross also demonstrates God's love for us. That is another facet of the atonement that Paul gives us here. It is not the only reason, but it is an important one. How do I know how much God loves us and loves me? Christ died for me when I was still a sinner and utterly incapable of reaching him or being reconciled to him. God did that for me. He loves me!

5:9-11 - We have been justified by Jesus' blood, his life given for us. Because of this we are saved from God's wrath against sin. That means we shall not face the final wrath and judgment of God in the Day of the Lord. Faith in Jesus has made us righteous before God and that same faith will preserve us through the last judgment. We have already been pronounced not guilty! When we were enemies God reconciled us. Now that we are his sons and daughters we will experience Jesus' resurrection life! Instead of hell, the punishment we deserved because of our sin and rebellion, God gave us eternal life and reconciliation with him; a reward we did not deserve but which comes to us solely by his grace.

Paul's theological arguments here are unassailable. He masterfully outlines the logic of Jesus' death and resurrection and what he has accomplished for us. Paul understood the implications of what Jesus had done for the whole human race but it was very personal to him as well. He had been God's enemy, persecuting Jesus and his church. Jesus died for Paul when Paul opposed everything Jesus and the gospel stood for. Paul was under God's wrath, full of spiritual pride as a Pharisee thinking that he was righteous before God when in reality he was lost! Yet because God loved him so much and had a new life and plan for him Jesus died and rose again so that Paul could be reconciled to God, not by his good works but solely by faith in Jesus Christ and what he had done. For Paul the universal truth of the gospel was personal. He had lived it and experienced the transformation that grace brought into his life. He felt God's love at a visceral level, that was God's gift to him through his Spirit and it helped Paul to not only logically teach the gospel but passionately proclaim it!

5:12-14 - Sin entered the human race through Adam and death came as a consequence of sin; therefore all died because all sinned. Adam's sin, because he was the first man, was passed to all his descendants, namely the entire human race. Sin's consequence was death. *Genesis 3* describes death in much broader terms than just physical death, the tearing apart of soul and body. The worst consequence of death is spiritual death, the death of our relationship with God. Every descendant of Adam and Eve confirm their sin by sinning themselves and therefore being subject to death.

Verses 13-14 are curious. Paul ignores Noah and the flood in these verses. Surely God took sin into account even if it was before the giving of the Law. *Genesis* describes the wickedness of people in Noah's time. Paul had earlier argued that the Law informed us of our sin. Perhaps the knowledge of sin in Noah's day was only partial. Whatever the case death still reigned because all sinned, therefore all died. Paul is trying to make the point that the Law increased our knowledge of sin but was powerless to help us overcome it. That may explain why he simply ignores the flood and the wicked circumstances leading up to it that led God to judge the world through it. The bottom line is sin was in the world from Adam to Moses because death was in the world and sin brings death.

5:15-17 - Paul contrasts the trespass and the gift. The trespass is the sin of Adam the first man, the result of which is death which then passed to all human beings because we all inherited his sin. Therefore we all died because we were now predisposed to sin. This is the concept of original sin. One sin, Adam's, brought death and sin to all.

The gift is the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus becomes a second Adam, a new start for the human race. Through his obedience to God and his sacrifice of himself for us we inherit eternal life and forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' gift comes to us by faith; we must receive his gift to us, trusting our lives to him and his forgiveness. The verb for receive is a

present active participle in the nominative case in Greek. The present tense implies continuous action. The nominative case means the participle is functioning as the subject of the sentence with the verb being *reign* in the future active tense. That is why the NIV translates the participle as "*those who receive God's abundant provision of grace...*" You could translate it "*the receiving ones.*" This is our response to God's free gift of grace in Jesus. We must actively receive the gift by faith. Jesus died for us all but his gift of grace is not appropriated to us unless we receive it.

This is one of the fundamental differences between the trespass and the gift. Adam's sin led to death which spread to us all without any choice on our part. We are all born into sin and death. We then confirm that inheritance by choosing sin and rebelling against God which results in our death. There is nothing we can do to not choose sin because we are not free not to sin. We are determined but still responsible for our choices to sin. But God's grace comes to us freely and with a choice. We are not determined towards life. We can choose life or death and God's grace gives us the opportunity to choose life and overcome sin and death in our lives by receiving in faith Jesus' gift of forgiveness. The trespass of the one man brought death and judgment to all people. The gift brought life and justification through the one man Jesus to all who would receive it. This verse confirms the simple outline of the gospel we have been preaching at Southside, that we must receive the gift of God in order for it to take effect in our lives.

5:18-19 - One could read these verses and conclude that because sin condemns all to death grace will save all to life, regardless of faith in Jesus. These verses could be taken to justify universalism. However Paul has just stated in *verse 17* that we must receive the grace of God through faith in Jesus. And taken in the whole context of *Romans* it is clear we receive grace and are justified by faith alone. Some will reject God and perish in their sin but many will receive Jesus, be forgiven and live.

Paul's universal language expresses the truth that Jesus' death and resurrection were for the whole human race. The potential was there for all to be saved and have eternal life. The reality is that only those who receive Jesus are saved. This is an argument against the limited atonement theory of some Calvinists. Although the practical outworking of faith in Jesus is that only those who believe are saved and the saved are the elect. Did Jesus die only for the elect? No, because Scripture affirms that God desires all people to be saved not just some. This is one of those places where the tension between God's will and purpose and our free will as humans to choose or reject God intersect. You have to hold on to both sides of the tension and live with the ambiguity.

Paul's language here recalls *Isaiah 53* that the servant of God would make many righteous through his death for sinners.

5:20-21 - One of God's purposes for the Law was to magnify sin in the human race. Since the Law had no power to overcome sin and change the human heart it could only show people how far they were from God. This was the fallacy of the Pharisee's works based righteousness. The harder they tried the more convicted they would become. They had to deceive themselves into believing they were righteous before God by their works of the Law. Paul comments in *Philippians* that before the Law he considered himself blameless. He was lying to himself and could not see his own pride and arrogance. It is why Jesus pushed the Pharisees so hard to help them see their sin. Except for a handful, they never did.

God added the Law to increase the trespass, to turn up the heat, but where sin increased through the Law grace increased all the more. The Greek word for *increased* means to overflow

exceedingly or to abound exceedingly. It is one of Paul's favorite "grace words" in his letters. If sin reigned in death, grace might reign in righteousness to bring many to eternal life in Jesus. The choice of verb moods in Greek by Paul is important and points back to our needing to receive God's grace through faith in Jesus. Sin reigns in death, which is an aorist indicative. It is an accomplished fact. God's grace may reign through righteousness to eternal life in Jesus. This is an aorist subjunctive, the mood of contingency. It is contingent on whether we accept Jesus' death and resurrection for us. Sin and death are an accomplished fact in the human race. Jesus Christ holds out the hope of forgiveness and eternal life to all those who receive him as Lord and Savior.

Grace is stronger than sin and overcomes it. Yet this concept became the foundation for a criticism of Paul that saw grace as a license to sin. God forgives us so why not live like we want and get a free ticket to heaven? Paul will respond to that criticism in *chapter 6*.

Chapter 6:

6:1-2 - Why not sin in order to get more grace? Paul's opponents used this line of reasoning against him, twisting what he was saying about grace, misunderstanding it. Was this from the Judaizers? They would have held obedience to the Law as the highest good and believed that a person could obey it and be justified before God through their obedience. Paul has shown in *chapters 3-5* how that is impossible and he will reiterate that argument again in *chapter 7*. The Law cannot save us and on my own power I cannot obey it enough to be righteous before God let alone earn my salvation.

6:2-10 - The answer to why not go on sinning to get more grace is that we died to sin and are no longer its slave. How then can we live in sin any longer? Paul argues that in baptism through faith in Jesus we have been included into and identified with Jesus' death. We are counted dead to sin. That means we have been set free from our old master sin. Now in baptism we have a new master Jesus Christ. And, since Jesus not only died but rose again we also will rise. Even now we taste the beginnings of the resurrection life by being able to choose not to sin but obey God!

In Christ our old self, literally in Greek our worn out man, was crucified so that this body of sin might be "*done away with*." Another way to translate the aorist subjunctive here is: to render inoperative, to deprive of influence and power, or to be discharged from or set free. This is a very rich word and Paul uses it to help us understand what has happened to us when we are identified with Jesus in baptism. Our old self, our sinful self, was crucified or put to death. When the old self died our bodies which are slaves to sin were made ineffective. Our bodies under the control and lordship of sin have been deprived of their power over us. That means we are no longer its slave because anyone who has died is freed from sin. A slave is free of his or her master when they die. Sin was our master but when we trusted Jesus as Lord we were included by faith into his death on the cross and died with him. I have been crucified with Christ Paul says in *Galatians 2*. Baptism is the symbol and seal of that death to sin. It is the symbol of me transferring my allegiance from sin to Jesus Christ as Lord!

Paul goes on in *verse 9* to say because Jesus is risen he cannot die again. His resurrection body and life are immortal and not subject to death and destruction. It no longer belongs to this world; it belongs to the age to come and the Kingdom of God. Someday when he comes we too will receive bodies like his. Baptism is God's pledge to us, God's promise, that this is so.

This whole passage demonstrates that there is much more going on in baptism than my public confession of Jesus as Lord. Baptism is mostly God's work in me and not my work toward

God. Paul is saying that because I am identified with Christ and are included into his death by faith I have transferred owners. I am dead to sin, no longer under its power and authority and now I am alive to God, under Jesus' power and authority. Sin, my old master wanted to destroy and kill me. Jesus, my new master wants to give me eternal life and reconcile me to God, not as a slave but as a son and heir. It's the difference between being a slave to a cruel and wicked owner and being a loyal and trusted servant of the good and loving king. I am a servant in either case but who my Lord is makes all the difference!

6:11-14 - The word for reckon is a present imperative from *logizomai*. It means to reckon, count, calculate, compute, take into account, determine, or number oneself. The word refers to facts not suppositions. It is a banking word that describes how much money one has in one's account. Paul is saying much more than I ought to believe I am dead to sin and alive to God. No, I need to reckon myself this way. It is a fact, not a hope. I have in fact transferred masters. Sin is no longer my master Jesus is. When sin demands my obedience I no longer have to obey its voice. I do not have to because I am free from sin's tyranny. Therefore when I sin now in Christ I have made a free choice to sin and disobey my new master and Lord. I have been deceived, thinking I had no power to resist sin, whereas the truth is I did not have to obey sin at all! I can choose to obey God through Jesus Christ my Lord! The present imperative of "*count*" carries the force of continuous action. Keep on counting yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Why, because sin will keep on trying to get you to obey it and not Jesus. I still live in this body of sin with all of its desires and sinful habits. Yet my spirit can now obey God. That is the war I find myself in once I receive Jesus and declare him Lord. It is however a war Jesus is winning in me whenever I choose to obey him and not sin! That choice is before me every moment of every day. Paul reinforces that idea in using another present imperative in verse 12, do not let sin reign or rule in your mortal bodies to obey its desires. This too is a constant choice that is before me.

I begin my journey of discipleship in Jesus the moment I receive him, but every day after I need to continue to choose to follow him and obey him and not sin. He is my master now because I am dead to sin and alive to God. Jesus is Lord in me not sin. When I was a sinner and sin was my master I had no choice. Sin reigned because I was under sin. Now that I am under Christ I can choose Jesus. I don't have to be under sin's power and control because I don't belong to it anymore! I belong to Jesus Christ my Lord! Therefore I can offer myself to God and my body to him as an instrument of his righteousness. I am no longer under the Law which trapped me in my inability to obey God and gave sin the victory. I am under grace in which I died to sin in Jesus who has given me the power to obey him and submit myself to him daily. Luther was right. When I was under sin, "*I was not free not to sin.*" Now that I am in Christ, "*I am free not to sin.*" I can choose God and his ways because Jesus is my master and I am under his grace. As Karl Barth said, "*Grace is the power to obey!*"

6:15-18 - This is a difficult paragraph. Paul begins with a question. Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? The verb in Greek is an aorist active subjunctive, expressing a contingency. It is aorist and not present meaning an action as a point in time and not continuous action. Paul is not asking shall we keep on sinning, but shall we sin. The problem is what does he mean? Is he saying that I will never sin now that I am under grace? Or is he saying because I am under grace I do not have to sin. God's grace gives me the power to obey God as Barth said. I think that is what he is saying because his question is immediately followed by an exclamation, "*by no means!*" Literally translated it means may it never be. In other words Paul is not saying a

Christian will never sin again but that the grace of God in us gives us the power to obey God so that we can overcome sin in our lives and not follow it. When we obey God by his grace we do not sin. When we sin we have chosen to obey sin and our own selfish desires and not God. It all comes down to whom we obey. Paul is framing his whole point as a matter of lordship. Who is Lord, Jesus or sin? That is why the crux of the gospel is Jesus as Lord and not Jesus as my Personal Savior.

The problem we have with this passage is he describes us as slaves, either to sin which leads to death or of righteousness which leads to life and holiness. We don't like being described as a slave to anyone. We want to perceive ourselves as free agents able to choose what we want when we want it, subject to no one. The reality is that is an illusion. We are already subject to sin and slaves to it. As Martin Luther said apart from Christ I am not free not to sin. I am responsible for my moral choices but because I am a sinner and bound by sin I will eventually always choose sin. There are moral pagans and Paul would not deny that but even the most moral person alive still sins because he or she is bound to sin and not free not to sin. Sin is their master. And it sows death in them and in me. That death is more than physical death; it is death in all of its manifestations as in *Genesis 3*, the spoiling of all the key relationships of life.

But when Jesus became my Lord I now have a new master and I have been redeemed and set free from sin as my lord. Jesus is now Lord and he gives me the power to obey him. I can choose through his grace to obey God and be righteous. I am righteous before God because now I am justified through faith in the Lord Jesus. That is my moral standing and because of his grace that justification is working itself out in my everyday moral choices to obey God and not sin. Paul will call that process sanctification. In that sense sanctification is making real in my earthly life that which is already true in heaven with God. I am righteous before him. It is all because of grace!

The phrase in verse 17 "*you have wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted*" is also a difficult one. Paul uses language one does not expect. He has written of Jesus as our Lord and one would expect he would say: you obeyed the Lord Jesus. Instead he speaks of the form of teaching which means the pattern of teaching or the tradition you were given or to which you were entrusted. In context this means the gospel message. Paul may be harkening back to *1:16-17*, the gospel itself is the power of God for salvation. The righteousness of God is revealed in it. It does not make sense to see this as a body of teaching, like the Jewish Law, with rules and regulations. He has been talking about Lordship and which Lord we serve and obey. It is in the gospel, the teaching (Greek *didache*) entrusted to you, which you obeyed with your whole heart that you made the choice to turn away from sin as your lord and accept Jesus as Lord. In that choice you were set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. You have a new master now, Jesus Christ. Paul is saying the Lordship of Jesus is presented to us in the gospel. When we hear the gospel we are presented with a choice; which Lord will we serve, sin or Jesus?

6:19-23 - Paul tells the Romans to offer their bodies to God in order to become holy. He will repeat this theme in *Romans 12* as our response to all God has done for us and the response that God wants to produce in us.

The key here is to understand Paul's solution to the war with sin going on within us. We are justified before God and the Holy Spirit now lives in us. Yet we still live in these sinful bodies which are predisposed to sin. God is in the process of redeeming all of us through the Lord Jesus. The power of sin to enslave me is now broken through the grace of God in me in the

person of the Holy Spirit. He gives me the ability to submit myself, my body and all its members and desires to Jesus moment by moment. When I do I obey God and overcome my old sinful nature. This fight to obey *IS* the normal Christian life! This is the process of sanctification, making real in my earthly existence what is real before God in heaven. I used to offer myself to sin and wickedness when sin was my master. That led to death in me. Now Paul says offer yourself to God through the Lord Jesus which will lead to life.

We are free from sin and are now under new ownership; Jesus Christ our Creator and Lord. The relationship of creature to Creator has been restored to its rightful place. Now that Jesus is my master as I submit to him I become more like him, more holy. That holiness leads to eternal life. Sin paid me death in the end. Jesus freely gives me eternal life. I earned what was due me under sin's mastery. I am given what is not due me under Jesus. Grace is stronger than sin! Forgiveness is stronger than judgment! Life is stronger than death!

There is a great quote from the study Bible I use for my devotions concerning *verse 23*. *"Sin pays us what we earn - death. God gives us what we need - eternal life. Which do you want? Thus Paul summarizes his first six chapters. We have a choice; serve sin and die, or serve Christ and live forever."*

Chapter 7:

7:1-3 - Paul makes the case that we are dead to the Law when we accept Jesus as Lord because we have been included into his death by faith. He begins by using the example of a woman whose husband dies. As long as he is alive she is bound to him and may not marry another. But if he dies she is free and may marry again and is not considered an adulteress. When her husband dies she is no longer bound to him. So we are free from the Law and no longer bound to it when we die in Christ.

7:4-6 - God put the entire sinful human race into his Son on the cross and when Jesus' body died, we died. When we trust him by faith the benefits of his death are now counted, reckoned, to us by God. We appropriate those benefits to ourselves by faith in Jesus as Lord. We do not deserve them or earn them; they are given to us through God's grace by faith. We died to the Law when Christ died because God put us in Christ. His physical body died and his Spirit separated from it. This is also a good passage to show that Jesus was fully human. He truly died. He didn't just appear to die.

We died in Christ through his cross, but now we live in Christ through his resurrection from the dead. Just as God put us in Christ on the cross and we died in him when he died so God has also included us into Christ when Jesus rose from the dead. Now we are free from the Law's bondage which only fed our sinful desires because the Law has no power to change our hearts it can only show us how sinful we are. Jesus is risen and now lives forever and because he is risen so are we. We have died to the Law and are no longer bound to try and serve God through it. Now we serve God through his Spirit who is able to do what the old written code of the Law could not; change our hearts and make us like Christ!

7:7-13 - Paul is careful not to make the Law out to be sin. The Law is holy and good but its main purpose is to show me what sin is and to increase my guilt before God and my need for a savior. Paul sees this now but unfortunately as a Pharisee he could not understand the Law's purpose because he thought he could obey it on his own. However, part of *chapter 7* may be some of his reflections on what his life was like before he met the Lord Jesus. The Law said, do not covet

and it awoke in him all sorts of covetousness that he never knew was in him. Sin working in us takes the commandment and intensifies every kind of evil desire in us and so kills us. He speaks as if sin were a physical or personal force or entity that is alive in him. He also repeats the phrase in *verse 11*. Paul is showing us that sin is more than an evil action it is a power at work in us through our old sinful natures that the Law exposes for what it is, evil and rebellion against God.

It is important to note that Paul is using the concept of law in a broad and general sense and not just referring to the Law of Moses. For Paul as a Jew the Law he knew was God's Law. But what about those who are Gentiles who were raised apart from the Law of Moses and never heard of it? In that case one needs to refer back to Paul's argument in *chapter 2* and the Law of Conscience. God's moral Law has been written on the hearts of the whole human race through our consciences so that no one is righteous before God on their own. All are condemned and guilty even those who never heard the Ten Commandments. God's Law, whether through the written commandments of the Law of Moses or our conscience, helps us understand what is right and good to do, giving us knowledge of what God desires. Sin takes advantage of the commandment, intensifies my desires and leads me to disobey God and die. It is like a little child whose mother tells him or her no cookies before dinner. As soon as that child hears its mother tell it no cookies the desire for a cookie becomes overwhelming in them and they sneak a cookie before dinner and disobey their mother. The example is a trivial one but the principle is the same no matter how grievous the sin. The Law only has the power to increase our understanding of how sinful we are by intensifying the command and showing us how far away from God we truly are. The commandment brings judgment and so condemns me to death.

Does God's Law which is good and holy bring evil and death to me? No, it is sin in me that produces death. Sin takes that which is good and meant to show me life, God's Law, and uses it to kill me so that sin might be shown to be exactly what it is: sinful to the maximum.

7:14-20 - God's Law is good and spiritual, Greek *pneumatikos*, meaning of the Spirit. In my old self apart from Christ I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. Sin is my master. Paul then describes the battle that rages in him between doing what he knows is right and wants to do and that which he ends up doing which is what he hates and sinful. I believe this is more than Paul describing his old life under the Law as a Pharisee. This is Paul reflecting on his current life as a Christian when he tries to do what is right and good on his own power. He cannot.

Paul describes sin as almost a living entity here as if there is another being living in Paul that makes him do sinful things but it is not truly Paul. He is not trying to excuse his behavior. It is as if he is saying a Christian is schizophrenic - two separate people in us warring for control. There is Jesus and our new self which is submitted to him and there is sin and our self which is submitted to it. Our true self is Christ's, but our old self still rears its ugly head and tries to wrest control of our mind and body in order to sin. Paul recognizes that his old self contains no good thing. His old sinful self is utterly incapable of obeying God and doing what is right. That means either God's grace through the Holy Spirit must help him obey or he will not obey God, ever! He admits he knows what is right he just can't do it. That is a very important point to understand. Many today would argue that social institutions, bad upbringing, dysfunctional homes etc. explain people's bad and destructive behavior. They would argue that good and moral behavior is simply a matter of better education. When people are taught what is right they will do what is right. The famous Greek philosopher Plato argued this. Paul explodes that idea as a myth. Just because I know what is right does not mean I will do it. In fact I will often do exactly the opposite! That is sin working in me. Moral behavior is not a matter of good education. Sin's

power must be broken in me before I will do the will of God! Otherwise I will continue to sin even though I know what is right! That is why Paul's old way of salvation as a Pharisee, keeping the Law, does not work.

7:21-25 - Paul uses law here in *verse 21* in the sense of principle. He will use it in the same sense in *8:1-4* as well. It makes it confusing because he has used law in the sense of the Law of Moses or the moral law of conscience up till this point.

Paul outlines the war within every Christian. He puts it in very Greek terms of mind and body. Here Paul is talking about his current experience as a Christian not his past experience as a Pharisee before he met Jesus. Apart from the Holy Spirit and walking in him this is what will happen to us and in us. Sin will try and wrest control of our selves from our minds which know what is right in order to sin and keep us from obeying God. The battle is raged in our minds which leads to our wills and our choices. When we depend upon our own strength we will *ALWAYS* lose this fight. That is why Paul cries out in *verse 24*, "*Wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death?*" The problem is he makes it sound as if his mind is fine but his body is the sinful part. The reality is all of us are tainted by sin. That is why he says our minds need to be transformed and remade in *chapter 12*. We are totally depraved; every part of our mind, body, and soul is corrupted by sin. Only in Christ can we have victory. Thanks be to God that he has given us that victory through Jesus! As Karl Barth says, "*Thanks be to God I am not the wretched man that I am!*"

Chapter 8:

8:1-4 - Paul has shown that in Jesus we are free from sin's rule in our lives because we are dead to sin, having been crucified with Christ. He begins *chapter 8* with the word "*therefore*." If all of this is true then this is the conclusion. If we are dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ this is what follows. There is no more condemnation for those in Christ Jesus! The word for condemnation is *katakrima* in Greek. The root verb is *katakrino* which means to condemn or pass judgment on someone, to sentence them to punishment. A well-known Greek-English lexicon translates *Romans 8:3* using this verb as: "*God has pronounced his sentence on sin in the flesh*." *Katakrima* is the noun form of the verbal root and means punishment or doom. We are pronounced guilty of a capital crime and *katakrima* is the execution, the sentence that we deserve for our guilt. *Katakrima* is only used three times in the New Testament, all by Paul and all in *Romans*. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says *katakrima* means the entire process of condemnation from the verdict through the carrying out of the sentence.

The word study is needed to understand more precisely what Paul is saying to us here. All those who are in Christ by faith in him as Lord are no longer subject to God's verdict of guilty for their sins and the punishment that goes with that guilty verdict, namely eternal death and separation from God, hell. This is true because I have been crucified with Christ and have been set free from what sin and death produced in me. By believing in Jesus I have transferred allegiance from sin to Christ and therefore have also transferred the consequences of that lordship and relationship, from death to life.

Paul uses *nomos*, the Greek word for law, in a confusing way in these first three verses. We are free from the Law of Moses as a way of salvation. That is how he uses it in *verse 3*. Yet in *verse 2* he uses law in the sense of principle because he says we are free from the law of sin and death. That cannot be God's Law which is righteous and holy. It has to be the demands or principle of sin and death. Jesus sets us free from that! In *verse 2* he uses the law, principle, of

the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. He is referring to the Holy Spirit who now lives in us because of our faith in Christ.

Paul has already shown in *chapters 5-7* that the Law cannot save us. It is powerless to do so. All it can do is show me how bad my sin really is; it has no power to change my character and transform it. That is what Paul now reiterates in *verse 3*. He then says God judged and paid for sin once and for all in the death of Jesus. Jesus was the representative man who stood for the entire human race yet because he was also God he could take all our sin into himself and put it to death on the cross. Because Jesus is God, God could put us all into Christ and so we died when he died. That means now we are free from sin and its punishment, death. Sin brings death and demands life in payment. That is the principle of atonement God gave Israel in *Leviticus*. God used the same principle with Jesus on the cross. Except, rather than an animal that could pay for one person's sin he used his own Son who could pay for all people's sin at once and so all sin is fully paid for.

God's purpose in all of this, saving us and giving us the Holy Spirit, is so that when we live or walk according to the Spirit we will do the will of God. God wants a people for himself who will obey him out of love and not out of duty. The only way for that to happen is if God does it in us. It is all related to surrender and lordship. The mind submitted to the Holy Spirit is controlled and filled with the Holy Spirit and can do the will of God. God saved us not so we could then have a license to sin and live as we please, but so that we could live to obey him and do his will! Justification leads to sanctification. Salvation leads to transformation!

8:5-8 - Literally in Greek Paul says, "*for those who are being according to the flesh keep on setting their minds according to the flesh.*" Here he does not use walk or live in the Spirit but "*be in the Spirit*". Those who live or are being or have their being in the Spirit set their minds on the Spirit and what he desires. The mind of our old sin nature, or flesh, is death; meaning the old sinful nature thinks about sin and sinful things which leads to death. The mind "*of the Spirit*" or the mind submitted to the Spirit is life and peace. When we submit our thoughts to the Spirit of God who lives within us that leads to life and peace in God.

When we set our minds to think about the things our old sinful natures think about we become hostile to God. The Greek word for hostile means hatred and enmity. Our old sinful nature, the flesh, hates God and does not want to do anything God wants us to do. In fact it cannot because it will not submit to God and his Law. Submit here means to voluntarily yield control to God, to subordinate myself to God. It is the same word Paul uses in *Ephesians 5* when he commands believers to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, including wives submitting to their husbands. If I submit to my old sinful nature, my flesh, I have no power to please God; I am unable to do so. Only living in the Spirit gives me the ability to please God, to accommodate myself to God's desires and interests.

Trying to follow the Law and be righteous before God by my own efforts means I cannot please God because I am incapable of doing so on my own. Invariably my sinful nature will sabotage my efforts at keeping God's Law and doing his will. I will be right back to the dilemma of *Romans 7*. My sinful mind cannot submit to God's Law and therefore I can never please God on my own. Only through the Spirit of God in me can I please God and do his will.

8:9-11 – However, believers in Jesus are not controlled by the flesh but by the Spirit. Literally the sentence reads, "*You are not being in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you.*" The Greek word for lives or dwells is related to the word for house, *oikos* in Greek. If the

Spirit of God has taken up residence in you then you are no longer living in or being in the flesh but now you are in the Spirit.

Paul uses the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit and the Holy Spirit all interchangeably in these verses. They are all one and the same. Therefore Jesus is God and so is the Holy Spirit. Paul is also telling us *THE* mark of the Christian is the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Paul once again describes the dichotomy of the Christian life and the struggle we all face every day. On the one hand our bodies, Greek *soma*, are dead because of sin, but our spirits, Greek *pneuma*, are alive because of righteousness, meaning the righteousness of God in Christ. Our bodies are still under the control and influence of sin, but our spirits have been born anew and are now under the control and influence of God through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Who we submit to every day determines whether we follow God or follow our old sinful nature. When we submit our spirits to God and our bodies as well to God we can live for him. But when our spirits want to follow God and our bodies are not submitted to God but to our sinful selves we find it difficult to follow God and we end up back in the sin-cycle of *Romans 7*. Living the Christian life every day is a matter of to whom we are submitted and submitting all of ourselves, including our bodies and their desires to God as well as our spirits. Paul has already told us this submission has to do with what we think about, where we focus our thoughts and center them. If we focus on God and the things of the Spirit we can submit our minds to the Spirit. But if we focus on the things of our old sinful natures and where our sinful selves want to focus, including our bodies, then we will not submit to Jesus and the Spirit and his lordship for that day. The Christian life therefore is a constant process of submitting ourselves to the Spirit and his Lordship and then following his leading and desires in our lives, thoughts and actions.

Paul concludes this section by saying if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you then that same Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies through the Holy Spirit. The verb for give life is a future indicative in Greek. I think Paul is referring here to the resurrection of our bodies at Jesus' Second Coming rather than a renewing of our bodies right now.

8:12-17 - The word for obligation in *verse 12* means a debtor, someone who is obligated to someone. Literally in Greek the sentence reads, "*therefore brothers obligated we are not to the flesh to live according to it.*" The NIV puts a "*but*" after obligation which I think softens the sentence. One could translate the phrase this way: "*Therefore brothers we are not under obligation to the old sinful nature to live according to it.*" That is the meaning of what Paul is trying to say. Paul uses "*therefore*" to bring to a conclusion what he has been saying about living in the Spirit. We have no debt to sin to pay off anymore! Sin, the flesh, our old sinful natures, has no hold on us any longer. We don't owe the old sinful nature anything! I don't have to obey it, whereas before I was in Christ I had to because I was a slave to it.

Paul reminds us what happens when we live according to the old sinful nature; we die. But, if we live by the Spirit we put to death or continually put to death the deeds of the body and will live. He means that when we live by the Spirit the old sinful nature in us is no longer in charge and that which our bodies under the old nature are predisposed to do they cannot do because now the Spirit of God is in charge. The old misdeeds of our bodies and their desires are halted in their tracks. Life is then sown into me not death! This happens because we are God's children, his sons when the Spirit of God reigns in us.

Our spirits are alive because of the Holy Spirit even though our bodies are subject to death because of sin. But we are a unity of body and spirit so that what happens to the one happens to the other. This is the theater of the mind-spiritual battle in every Christian. The

question is which has the upper hand; body-flesh or the Holy Spirit? To who am I surrendered, the flesh and sin or Christ through the Holy Spirit? The difference now is that Jesus is *LORD*. He is in charge, in command and I am under obligation to obey him and follow him because he bought me with the price of his death and resurrection. Jesus is my master now and I am his slave. But *JESUS* is Lord. He is my brother, my friend and Savior who died for me. That makes God my Heavenly Father not a terror that I obey out of fear and threat. We no longer fear God out of the threat of punishment; that has been taken care of through Jesus' death and resurrection. I fear God in the proper sense of awe and respect out of love and gratitude for what he has done for me. He is now *Abba*, Daddy, Father!

Paul uses the "*Abba Father*" cry here in *Romans 8* just as he did in *Galatians 4*. The ability to cry out *Abba*, Father and mean it, that God is my Father in heaven, is one of the two great confessional signs of the Holy Spirit. The other is the confession that Jesus is Lord in *1 Corinthians 12:2-3*. I cannot say God is my Father or know and address God in this intimate way of *Abba* without the Holy Spirit in me. It is his very sign. Thus the most important signs of the Spirit in the believer are relational and point to our newfound relationship with God, with Jesus as Lord and God as my Heavenly Father.

If God is my Father then I am God's child and if I am God's child I am an heir with Christ and a prince or princess of heaven itself! I am not a slave but a son! We are joint heirs with Christ and also fellow sufferers with him in order that we may share in his glory. Paul links suffering now with glory later. One cannot separate the two in the Christian's life. As Jesus said in *John 16*: *In this world you will have trouble but take heart; I have overcome the world!*

8:18-25 - Paul has referred to sharing in the sufferings of Christ in order that we might share in his glory in *verse 17*. Now in *verse 18* he says our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed. Paul at least had a hint of that glory from the heavenly vision he experienced and refers to in *2 Corinthians 12*. He is trying to help the Romans understand that just like Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross as *Hebrews 12* says, so it will be with us. In fact all creation waits with eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed as they will be. Paul has said we are God's children, his sons and daughters in *8:16-17*. The glory to be revealed is our resurrected state and the Kingdom of God in its fullness. That will happen when the Lord Jesus returns. Paul is speaking here of our eschatological glory. The Greek words literally say, "*for the eagerly expecting creation of the revealing of the sons of God is waiting.*"

It is waiting for our full redemption because it was made subject to "*frustration*". The Greek word for made subject is the same word Paul uses earlier concerning being in submission to either Christ as Lord or sin. The Greek verb here is an aorist passive indicative. This was not the creation's choice it was subjected to frustration by its Creator for our sake. The word translated frustration means emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness. The NIV translates the word frustration, the NASB futility. The word means in various contexts ruin, destruction, dissolution, corruption, seduction or depravity. The word often has moral meanings and that is why it is a difficult word here. In context Paul is saying the universe itself has been under the slavery or bondage of decay and corruption; meaning all things live and then die and decay back into the elements from which they were formed whether living or inanimate. Entropy is a principle that operates throughout the observable universe. That decay or entropy is not necessarily moral in nature but it is a result of God's direct action on his creation.

The difficulty is in understanding exactly to what Paul is referring. Is he saying that when human beings fell into sin God subjected the universe to decay and corruption? Or is he saying

that he created the universe subject to decay and entropy from the beginning? In that case did God create the universe in anticipation of sin? What about Satan? When Satan fell didn't sin and corruption enter into the universe? This is a difficult passage. For instance was entropy present from the beginning? Were animals ever meant to be immortal like humans? Was there predator and prey at the beginning of creation or was that all a result of human sin? I don't think you can argue that animals were meant to be immortal and there was no death in the beginning and no entropy in the universe. I think human beings were meant to be immortal. However if you say there was no entropy then that means the creation itself was meant to be resurrected and changed. There is evidence in the Old Testament prophets and *Revelation* that this will occur at the consummation, the new heaven and new earth.

Paul says the whole creation has been groaning like a woman in labor right up to the present time. This implies from the beginning the creation was waiting for our redemption and revealing! Jesus' resurrection was the first installment of that revealing. Not only that but we ourselves have the first fruits of the life of the age to come in the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. The Spirit leads us to groan as well, waiting for our resurrection and adoption as sons of God to be revealed. We are waiting for the ultimate taste of redemption and glory; the resurrection of our bodies. Our full and complete adoption as God's sons and daughters, heirs of Jesus, awaits Jesus' return. It is not yet complete. The Spirit is our guarantee, God's pledge to us he will fulfill his promise to raise us with Christ and bring his Kingdom in all its fullness. This is the hope in which we were saved, the already and not yet of salvation. We have not yet seen our resurrected state nor have we received it as yet. Jesus is our example. So now we wait patiently in hope for that great day. This is a corrective for those in Paul's day like some in Corinth who thought our resurrection had already occurred.

8:26-27 - In the same way, means in like manner, likewise. Literally the Greek words read, "*but likewise also the Spirit....*" The verb help means to come to the aid of and is in the present tense meaning the Spirit does this on a continual basis.

What does Paul mean, in the same way; how? The subject of the sentence is the Spirit and not us. I had thought he was referring to us waiting patiently for the Spirit to intercede in our prayers just as we wait patiently for the hope of resurrection. But that puts the focus on us and what we do. The focus here is on the Spirit. The Spirit is the first fruits of the life of the age to come and through him we experience the hope of the resurrection. Paul says we groan inwardly waiting for our redemption. The Spirit also helps us pray but intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. The Holy Spirit's intercession for us is part of his first fruits function. The concept that ties the two paragraphs together is the word groan. Paul uses the same root word in *verse 23* talking about groaning inwardly waiting for our resurrection bodies and in *verse 26* where he says the Spirit groans for us when he intercedes with God on our behalf.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereafter TDNT) says this about these verses: *In Romans 8:22–27 the apostle speaks of a triple sighing, that of all creation, that of Christians and that of the Spirit. This sequence is a crescendo. In verse 22 Paul declares that all creation up to this present sighs together and with pain awaits regeneration. The reason for the sighing is that through the fall of Adam creation is subject to bondage (verse 20). It waits with longing for the day when the glory of the children of God will be manifested. But Christians sigh too, verse 23. To be sure, their situation differs from that of the rest of creation. For they are already a new creation in Christ and as first-fruits of eschatological being they possess the Spirit. Yet their body is still subject to corruption. Because they wait for the redemption of their*

body, namely, the transforming of their earthly body into the body of glory, they sigh. To the sighing of creation and the children of God there then corresponds the sighing of the Spirit, verses 26ff. Since the reference is not to something which takes place in us, the apostle cannot be thinking of the sighing of Christians in prayer. He is referring rather to times when we are unable to pray, when because of our "weakness" we do not know what we ought to pray for. This means that he cannot have in view speaking in tongues or the inarticulate stammering of ecstasies in worship. What he is saying is rather that the Spirit acts in our place and intercedes for us, performing the function of a Paraclete (Advocate) and helping us in our weakness in prayer. The process which Paul has in view is thus a process in the heavenly and divine sphere. Hence the "groans that words cannot express" (verse 26) are not unspoken, wordless sighs but sighs which cannot be grasped in words... But God understands the language of the Spirit, "because he intercedes for the saints in a way which corresponds to the will of God," (verse 27).

Paul intensifies the sighing in these five verses, from creation, to us, to the Spirit. The sighs however are the Spirit's sighs and not ours. They are too deep for words to express. Therefore these groans cannot be speaking in tongues because tongues, whether human or angelic, are still words in a language even though the speaker does not know it. Plus tongues are spoken by us with our spirits as Paul tells us in *1 Corinthians 14:13-17*. The "groans" he speaks of here are the Spirit's and not ours. One has to stick with the biblical data in defining tongues otherwise we use our experience to define Scripture and Scripture is not subject to our experience; it is the other way around!

What does all of this mean? The Holy Spirit loves us so much that he intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray. When we can't put into words what we need because of the anguish of a situation and we don't know what God's will is and what to pray for the Spirit steps in. He feels our pain and knows our hearts. He also knows the Father's heart and will and by his groaning for us connects the two. Where our deep need meets the will of God there you will find the Spirit interceding for us, groaning in pain for us. He is our advocate before the Father because he lives within us. If you tie this concept together with Paul's later statement in *Romans 8:34*, which says that Jesus is now at the right hand of God continually interceding for us, there emerges a picture of the Trinity interceding for God's people on a level that we can scarcely understand! No wonder John can say in *1 John 5* that if we pray according to God's will he hears us and will answer our prayers. Prayer in God's will is more powerful than we can even understand because the entire Trinity is involved in hearing it and answering it! The Spirit even communicates it to the Father when we don't even know it so our prayers can be answered!

That means when we don't know how to pray for someone or in some situation we can have confidence that our prayers will be heard and that God will answer according to his will because the Spirit is interceding for us. We can have confidence that his will is good because he loves us so much and even groans for us before the Father on our behalf!

8:28-30 - There is some question as to the translation of this famous promise in *verse 28*. Literally the phrase reads like this: *We know that to those who love God all things he works together for good to those who are called according to the purpose*. An alternative manuscript translates the phrase, *all things work together for good to those who love God etc*. The grammar however clearly leads to the most accepted translation that sees God as the one who works all things together for the good of those who love him, rather than all things work together. *All things* are plural and the Greek verb, *works together*, is 3rd person singular. God is orchestrating events and works in all things for the good of his children. That means God can work good in

any situation no matter how horrible or painful. We need to be looking for his working and be open to it.

The great promise is followed by a causal clause in Greek, declaring the reason God works all things for our good. God works all things for our good because those he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...and those he predestined he called and those he called he justified and those he justified he glorified. All these Greek verbs are aorist verbs. They have been completed, done once and for all. From God's perspective our redemption and salvation are already complete. From our perspective we have yet to experience our glorification and conformity to the image of Christ in us. We are in the process of that happening to us as we live out our lives and walk in the Spirit. Paul is clear, the purpose of God in us is that we might be conformed to the image of his Son, that we might be like Jesus; like him in character; like him in a resurrected body; a perfect reflection of him in our own unique way! God has set in motion his plan which he knew and foreordained would happen even before the foundation of the world.

The difficulty we have with this passage is God's foreknowledge which leads to his predestinating our salvation and glorification. We choose Jesus because God foreordained it. Paul makes it sound like we had no choice in the matter. Who can resist God's call? If that is true then did I even have a choice in receiving Christ? What about those who don't receive Jesus, who reject him? Did God foreordain them to reject Jesus and therefore perish in hell? It is easy to jump to double predestination from this passage but we need to be careful to note that Paul does not say that here. He is not talking about those who don't believe but about those who do. In other places in *Romans* he talks about our choice of faith and our choice of Jesus as Lord. Once again we are met with the paradox that God is absolutely sovereign in his foreknowledge, predestination and calling of the believer. And, we are absolutely free in our choice of faith in Jesus. Both things must be held on to and kept in tension. Depending on one's perspective one emphasizes one side of the tension over against the other. Both are true. One needs to think Hebrew here and not Greek, because the paradox is a logical impossibility. The Hebrew mind accepts paradox as a normal occurrence when the eternal God intersects with finite humans.

The important thing that Paul points to here is the goal of God for us; to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Our salvation began in God before the world was created. He has worked it in us by calling us and justifying us. He will glorify us and bring this whole process to completion one day, of that we can be certain. In fact, from his point of view it is already accomplished. Justification is not the goal; it is merely one major step along the way of creating you and me as creatures who perfectly reflect Christ in our own unique ways. Paul is saying that God will use any and all circumstances, even the worst ones, to bring us to that goal, because the goal of becoming like Jesus is the highest good God could work in our lives! When we are finally like Jesus in body and spirit we will be complete as we were meant to be. We will be most fully human, created in the image of God and the image of Jesus our Savior and Lord.

8:31-36 - If all of this is true; God works for our good to make us like Christ in all things and God foreknew us, predestined us to know him, called us, justified us and will glorify us in Christ (this is from our perspective, from his it has already occurred); what shall we say to all of this? Paul's conclusion is monumental in its implications. If God is for us who can be against us? The one from whom I am estranged because of my sin; the one I cannot reach on my own even though I was created to have a relationship with him; the one who apart from Jesus I perceive only as judge and the one who condemns me; this same God is *FOR* me! He has chosen me and

saved me in order to transform me into a reflection of himself. He will bring me to his presence in glory for eternity. There is no reason from my perspective this should be true but it is. The one in whose presence I should tremble and fear because nothing I do can earn me the right to stand before him; he is for me. I find instead of condemnation he has called me to be his son and rather than judge he is now my *Abba*! It is beyond belief! It is his grace to me in Jesus Christ my Lord. If he then is for me, whom do I have to fear? Satan; he has been defeated! No demon's temptation or accusation can touch me ever again because my God is for me!

As further proof Paul adds, *the God who did not spare his own Son but freely gave him up for us all will he not also along with Christ freely give us all things?* The *all things* he is talking about are all the benefits of being a joint heir with the Lord Jesus. All the things of heaven are ours through Christ Jesus our Lord!

No charge Satan brings against us will stand because God has already justified us! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ; and he died for us, he rose for us and he intercedes for us! Paul is trying to help us understand that God's *FINAL* Word to us is not guilty; you are justified before me! When the accusations of the enemy come against us and the whispers come in our minds that God will never forgive us for that sin, the one who has the authority to judge us died for us, rose for us and intercedes for us before the Father, playing the role of our defense attorney. Satan may accuse us before God but Jesus Christ has never lost a case! We are forgiven! We can finally, completely and unequivocally rest in that fact. In all the Bible Paul's words here are one of the greatest statements of the assurance of our forgiveness. We can trust God and rest in his love and forgiveness for us!

Who or what shall separate us from Christ's love? Is there any hardship or persecution or danger that can tear us away from the love of the Lord Jesus' for us? Paul can think of none! He then uses a proof text from *Psalms 44*. For God's sake we face death all day long; we are like sheep led to the slaughter. In all of this section of *Romans 8* this seems the weakest section, his quote of *Psalms 44:22*. Yet Paul is pointing out the fact that troubles and hardships, far from indicating that God does not love us are normal for the Christ-follower. No trouble of this world no matter how great can tear us apart from the love of Christ. The Christian need not begin to doubt when trouble comes if God still loves him or her. We need fear nothing because nothing can separate us from Jesus' love. He has not abandoned us. He is right at the very moment of our trials and tribulations interceding before the Father on our behalf! He has the Father's ear and even if we suffer pain and hardship or the loss of our lives we will never suffer the loss of his love. He will bring us to himself and complete the work of transformation he began in us when we said yes to him!

8:37-39 - In all these things, meaning in all the trials, suffering and troubles we may face in this world, we are more than conquerors. The root word in Greek means to be victorious, to win the victory and Paul adds the preposition *hyper*, hyper, more than, over and above. We win a hyper-victory! This is why even in the midst of all the hardships Paul endured for the Lord Jesus' sake he had courage and kept his faith. Nothing he experienced could separate him from the love of his Lord. In that Paul was secure and we can be so as well.

Paul had become absolutely convinced that nothing he experienced in this world or in the spiritual realm could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. This was one of the bedrock convictions of his life and he expresses it here in words that reach a poetic climax to the first major section of *Romans*. They are some of the most moving in all the Bible and have over the centuries comforted and encouraged countless believers.

Paul piles each pair upon another in showing that nothing can separate us from the love of the Lord Jesus. Death or life, meaning anything that happens to us in this life or death itself has no power to separate us. Angels or demons as powerful as they are and as far above us as they are cannot touch us nor separate us from Jesus' love. We need not fear them. Neither the present and its trials nor the future and its worries are to be feared. They cannot touch God's love for us. No powers, which probably refers to pagan powers or astrological powers because height and depth which follow powers refer to them. Height I had translated in another place as the stars in their courses. Height can be an astronomical term and that makes sense in Paul's world. Astrology was huge in Paul's day and many Greeks thought the stars governed events and people's lives. Paul says here nothing the stars show can separate us from our Lord Jesus. Depth can also be an astronomical term as well as height, so taken together they can mean the stars in their courses. Depth can also refer to the deeps of the sea, which represented the forces of chaos in the ancient Hebrew mind. If that is the case Paul may be referring to the stars in their courses (height) and the deeps of the sea and the forces of chaos (depth). None of the mysterious forces the ancients were concerned about can separate us from God's love. In fact there is nothing in all creation in heaven or on earth, nothing in this universe or beyond it that can separate us from God's love. Only Christ has the power and ability to cut us off from himself. Jesus is the one who died for us, rose for us, intercedes for us and will come again for us. No other power or being in the universe or beyond it has the power to separate us from God's love. We can rest in that fact and reject any of the whispers of the enemy to the contrary. We are secure in Jesus' love forever!

Chapter 9:

9:1-5 - Paul now turns to the whole problem of Israel. If salvation is by faith in Jesus alone and we are justified by God's grace, what about the Jews? What about those in Israel who do not accept Jesus as their Messiah? Are they now lost? Paul claims that he is so grieved over his people's rejection of Jesus as Messiah that he would be willing to be cursed forever in hell if his people could be saved. In *Acts* Paul would often grapple with his Jewish opponents and tell them since they rejected Jesus he would go to the Gentiles because they would listen. Luke often gives the impression of a good riddance attitude by Paul at those moments. Yet here it is clear those rejections grieved Paul greatly. These next three chapters in *Romans*, 9-11, are some of the most difficult yet most important chapters in the whole letter. Whether the Roman Christians wrestled with these issues or Paul needed to work out his understanding of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, or both are true, we benefit from his writing. Is there a separate plan for the Jews as the Dispensationalists contend? In these three chapters Paul will fundamentally answer that question. The answer is no! The plan of God is Jesus or nothing!

Paul has asked in *Chapter 2* if we are saved by grace what benefit is it to be a Jew. Here he reiterates those benefits. They are adopted as God's children and people. They experienced God's glory among them and were the recipients of the covenants from God. Those covenants are: Abraham - *Genesis 12 & 17*; Sinai - *Exodus 19 & 20*; David - *2 Samuel 7*; New Covenant - *Jeremiah 31*. One could also argue that God's covenant with Aaron also belongs here. See *Numbers 17 & 18*. The covenants can be summed up in the phrase: I will be your God and you will be my people. The promises of God can be summed up in the phrase: I will be with you! The human ancestry of Jesus the Christ can also be traced through the Jews. Jesus is fully human yet he is also God as Paul says in *verse 5*. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine!

9:6-9 - If the Jews are rejecting their Messiah did the Word of God fail? No, because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Who is a true Jew? One who believes the promises of God by faith. Even Abraham's children did not all inherit the promise because it came through Isaac not Ishmael. Paul returns to his reasoning of *chapter 4*; Abraham's offspring are children of the promise by faith not by natural descent. God worked the miracle in Sarah's body that she conceived a son and gave birth to Isaac.

Paul's reasoning here can be used as an argument against Dispensationalism. The children of the promise inherit the promise, not all the natural born children inherit. The history of the Old Testament bears this out. Paul himself was descended from the tribe of Benjamin. The northern tribes were wiped out or absorbed into Judah and Benjamin. Even Paul was not descended from everyone in Benjamin who had lived in the land but only those who survived the exile. God saved a remnant from the Babylonian exiles not the whole people. The prophets say he saved a faithful remnant. Those who were disobedient to God perished in the fall of Israel and Judah. They did not inherit the promise because of their disobedience not because God was unfaithful. Even the Dispensationalists have to grant that the Jews who are saved are the faithful because they were the ones who survived! The coming of Jesus produced another crisis among the Jews and a test of their faith in God and their inheritance in his promises to them. The only way they will inherit the promises God made to them in the covenants is through their Messiah Jesus Christ. God has no other way!

9:10-18 - One must remember when reading these chapters what Paul is writing about. Everything he writes points back to the question of the Jews. They are God's chosen people yet many of them have rejected their Messiah, Jesus. What happens to them now? What about God's choice of them before Jesus came on the scene, is it now set aside? Are the Jews no longer God's people? These are the questions with which Paul is wrestling.

In the context of the question what about the Jews, Paul gives us great insight into the whole issue of election, predestination and human free will. In this section of *chapter 9* Paul emphasizes *GOD'S* free choice and will. God's choice of Jacob over Esau illustrates his purpose in the election of his people. God chooses one over against the other before they were born and had any chance of doing good deeds or bad. God chose, Jacob and Esau didn't, yet God's choice was worked out by their free choices in their lives as well. Were they determined? No, they were free to choose or reject God. But God was also free to choose Jacob over Esau. Both are true and must be held in tension.

If we start with our free will then election makes us very nervous because it sounds as if we have no choice at all. However, if we start with a sovereign and free God who is Lord over his creation and free to choose and orchestrate events and people according to his will to work out his plan for *HIS* creation, then election is the logical outcome of that sovereign freedom. Part of our struggle is we want God to save us by grace so we don't have to earn his salvation and then we turn around and argue that someone like Pharaoh wasn't treated fairly because God rejected him, as if he didn't deserve that rejection! We can't have it both ways! So Paul's statement in *verse 18* disturbs us; God will have mercy on whom he will and harden whom he will. Is God not free? Do we deserve his mercy? We sinners deserve his judgment! People will say it is not fair that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. If God treated us fairly there would not be grace! *Verse 18* also feeds our mistaken understanding of the character of God. He is first merciful not condemning. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, he wants all to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. Perhaps this section of *Romans* makes us

uncomfortable because the emphasis is on God, his character and sovereign authority and it reminds us that we are sinners before him and in rebellion against him. Apart from his grace to us we would all stand under condemnation and perish!

9:19-21 - Paul asks the natural question that occurs when we are confronted with the whole concept of God's election. Why are we still condemned because who can resist God? It's not fair! He then reminds his readers that we as sinners have rebelled against our rightful Creator and king. We exist by God's choice and action how then can we believe we have the right to talk back to God and challenge his authority over our lives? We are clay in the potter's hand and he has the right to shape the clay as he chooses. Paul quotes *Isaiah* and uses the image of the potter from *Jeremiah 18*. When we object that God doesn't have the right to make us as he chooses we forget the implications of God as our Creator! That is where one needs to always start when we discuss who God is. He is first of all our Creator! Therefore, God has the right as Creator to do anything he wants with his creatures. Yet he will always act within his character and never violate it or his Word. He is consistent. It is a miracle we receive grace from him at all!

Our quandary is how do we reconcile God's free choice as our Creator and our free will? In reading this section of *Romans* it is too easy to let go of the tension the Scriptures create and deny human free will so as to uphold God's sovereignty as Creator. But we cannot do that either otherwise we cannot respond to a loving Creator with love for him in return because in order to love we must be free. The paradox must be accepted and held on to in order to make sense of the biblical revelation of God, his sovereignty, our election and our free choice to the offer of salvation from God. We must hold on to both sides of the issue and live with the tension.

9:22-29 - *WHAT IF* God did such and such? Paul does not argue a direct double predestination here, meaning some are damned to hell and some are destined to be saved. This is a "what if" argument; a hypothetical to prove his point about election. God has saved a remnant of Israel by grace just as he has saved the Gentiles by grace through faith as well.

He asks what if God bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction? Paul cites four proof texts to show that God did exercise great patience with Israel, over and over giving them another chance until finally their sin demanded his judgment. Yet even then he still saved a remnant to preserve his people and to carry on his promise that it might be fulfilled. He saved his people by grace and election just as he saves the Gentiles in the same way. He quotes *Hosea 2:23* about calling a people who are not my people his people. He follows that with another quote from *Hosea 1:10* saying God will call those who are not my people his sons. Paul quotes *Isaiah 10:22-23* which says though Israel was like the sands of the sea only a remnant will be saved because Israel is under judgment. He concludes this string of quotes with *Isaiah 1:9* which states that unless the Lord had decided to save a remnant Israel would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah. There would have been no one left. The implication is for the sake of his promise God saved a remnant of the Jews even though they deserved his punishment. They did not earn his salvation but he saved the remnant anyway.

9:30-33 - God saves all people by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone! The Gentiles through the gospel have found that salvation. The Jews pursued a false path by trying to earn salvation through the Law. Paul understood only too well the lure of that way and the trap of the Law. As a Pharisee this is what he had believed and followed. Yet he too, until Jesus met him and saved him, stumbled over the stumbling stone of Jesus the crucified Messiah. Paul quotes *Isaiah 8:14*

& 28:16 in support. God is not mocked. He will save whom he will save and owes no one anything. Thus salvation is by grace alone through the election of God by faith in Jesus Christ alone! And if salvation is by grace alone then the Jews are not saved apart from Jesus Christ their Messiah for only in Jesus can anyone be saved.

Chapter 10:

10:1-4 - Paul once again expresses his heart's desire that Israel would be saved and declare Jesus as their Messiah. He wanted his fellow Jews to believe and be saved!

Paul could testify to how zealous his fellow Jews were for the Law of God because he had been so himself. This is an autobiographical description of who Paul was! As a Christian he had experienced their zeal as well in their opposition to his preaching the grace of Christ apart from the Law. Paul says the zealousness of the Jews is misguided because it is not based in knowledge. They have not rightly interpreted the Scriptures to understand that Jesus is the Messiah and that salvation cannot come by works of the Law. One could understand their mistake however. Since the time of *Ezra* in the Persian period the Jews had defined themselves as the people of the Law. It is what made them a Jew because they had no nation, no land, and no king. All they had was God's covenant and the Law of Moses. Along comes Paul and says the Law is no longer valid as a means of salvation and that even the Gentiles can become part of God's covenant people and it felt to them like he was taking away their very identity as a people. What did it mean to be a Jew then? Paul's answer was we are God's ancient people and now we have a king, Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah. The new age has dawned and God is fulfilling his promises by sending the Holy Spirit on all who believe in Jesus as Lord. The Gentiles can come into God's covenant people because they are receiving *OUR* Messiah by faith just as we are! Messiah Jesus doesn't destroy our identity as Jews he completes it!

Paul re-states what he has said many times in *Romans*; the Law is powerless as a way to become righteous before God. On our own by works of the Law we cannot be righteous before God. We will always fall short. Only in Christ and submitting to him as Lord can we become righteous in God's sight, not with a righteousness based on our own merit but with God's righteousness that he imputes to us by faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the end, the goal, Greek *telos*, of the Law. The way is now opened through him to obtain the righteousness of God by faith. The Law pointed to Jesus by both describing God's righteousness and through its demands helping people understand they could not meet those demands by themselves. The Law convicted us that we need a savior. Paul says in *Galatians 3* the Law was our tutor until Jesus the Messiah came.

10:5-12 - Paul uses four quotes from the Law of Moses, one from *Leviticus* and three from *Deuteronomy* to make his case that even the Law Moses was pointing to the righteousness of God that comes through faith. First he states that if one is to be righteous before God by works of the Law then one must live totally by the Law and keep it all. This is related to his case in *Romans 2 and 3* that if you break one command you break them all and therefore it is impossible to keep the Law perfectly. Paul then uses the three quotes from *Deuteronomy* to prove that God's revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ is readily available to us. The word is near. We don't have to go in search of the revelation of God that will save us. God has revealed himself in the gospel such that by believing his Word, trusting Jesus as Lord, we can have a relationship with God and be righteous before him.

The word of faith that Paul proclaims, that brings salvation and God's righteousness is: "*Jesus is Lord and God raised him from the dead!*" Lordship and resurrection is the key, not savior and death. Both are true but Lordship has the priority because Lordship works the fundamental transformation of the human heart, submitting to God and his rule. When that happens the Holy Spirit comes into a person's life and the work of transformation-sanctification begins. The righteousness of God is not only given to a person, that same righteousness begins to work itself out in a person's life through the work of the Spirit within them as they daily submit to Jesus as Lord.

Here in *verses 9-10* is the one time Paul gives a formula for receiving Christ and becoming a Christian. There are two parts. First one confesses with the mouth that Jesus is Lord. To confess here means to declare publicly. The Greek verb is an aorist active subjunctive and means to profess, declare openly. The aorist implies point action, something that is done once and for all. I profess my allegiance and faith in Jesus publicly once at the beginning of my walk with him. It is not something I have to do again and again. Either Jesus is my Lord or he is not. Paul is showing us there is a public component to faith. It is not just a private matter. Jesus called people to follow him publicly and we need to declare publicly that our lives are submitted to him as Lord. That is why our baptisms are so key; they involve a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The second component is: I believe in my heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. In other words I believe he is alive not dead. I follow a living Lord not a dead teacher and example! Believe here in Greek is another aorist subjunctive. This too is a once for all decision of faith. I believe he is alive by the power of God. Paul says if I do these two things I am saved. Justification comes to me when I believe God raised Jesus from the dead and I submit to him as Lord!

Paul quotes *Joel 2* that *ALL* who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. He reiterates there are no distinctions between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord saves both in the same way: faith in Jesus through the confession of his Lordship and the belief that he is risen.

In this paragraph Paul outlines for us the center of the gospel and the essential confession of faith one makes in order to be saved. Jesus is our Savior but Paul uses the language of Lordship. Jesus died on the cross for our sins but here Paul points to the resurrection as the key. The American Protestant gospel centers on accepting Jesus as my personal savior and believing he died on the cross for my sins. Paul will tell the *Corinthians* that in Corinth he wanted to know nothing else than Jesus Christ and him crucified. Here to the *Romans* he says the one essential thing to know and confess is God raised Jesus from the dead and I submit to him as Lord, King, and Leader of my life. That is the relationship that transforms me and repairs the breach that sin worked in my life in my relationship with God. It is restored because now I am no longer trying to be a god myself and be my own lord. Jesus is Lord; he is God and Creator, and I diminish and become the creature that I am, loyal to my Creator alone. The image of God is restored and God makes me righteous before him. For my part from this moment on I follow the Lord Jesus as his disciple! That is the gospel Paul preached and that is the gospel that transformed the world! In our American Evangelical churches we often complain we have lost the power and passion of the early church. Perhaps it is because we have lost the power and passion of the true gospel that changed the world!

10:14-15 - God's chosen method of salvation is through the proclamation of the gospel. His chosen method of proclamation is to send believers into every corner of the world with the

message of Christ which when received in faith saves! Paul quotes *Isaiah 52:7* in support. God sends out those who bring good news. Paul is one such messenger. Gospel means good news.

10:16-21 - The Word of Christ Paul refers to here is not the Scriptures in general but the message of and about Jesus. It is the gospel message and Jesus' own teaching. The gospel carries with it the power of God to bring about what it proclaims. Salvation is for everyone who hears and believes. Refer back to Paul's theme verse in *Romans 1:16-17*.

The gospel when received in faith saves. But not all who hear it believe it. Thus the gospel also carries judgment as well. When you hear it you are now responsible to it because it is the Word of God. If you hear it and reject it then you will be judged by it and there is no other way that God has provided through which we can be saved or have a right relationship with him. All Israel heard God's Word but not all Israel believed it. The same is true for us as Gentiles today.

Paul strings together four proof texts to illustrate that all Israel in Old Testament times heard the Word of God but not all Israel believed it. Paul applies this same principle to Israel in his day and we can apply it in our day as well. The first quote is from *Psalms 19:4* and implies that no matter where the Jews had been scattered they heard God's Word. The Diaspora has no excuse. Then Paul quotes Moses in *Deuteronomy 32:21* and Isaiah in *Isaiah 65:1*. Both point to the fact that Israel heard God's Word and did not believe and because of that God will send his Word to the nations that did not seek him, namely the Gentiles who will believe. He finishes the string of quotes with *Isaiah 65:2* which says God has reached out again and again to a disobedient and stubborn people. Even now God offers the gospel to the Jews first before it is given to the Gentiles. A remnant of the Jews believed in Paul's day. When Israel as a whole rejected their Messiah God opened the door for the Gentiles to receive the gospel and submit to the Lord Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, who is Lord of all!

Chapter 11:

11:1-6 - Israel's rejection does not mean God has rejected his people. He preserved a remnant during the exile all the way up through Jesus' time in order that a remnant might be preserved through faith in Jesus Christ. It is all by God's grace and not by works. Paul reinforces that a Jew is a Jew by grace not by works or natural descent. Paul himself is evidence of this fact. He is a Jew by natural descent from Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin. Yet he is the first to acknowledge that God saved him by his grace through Jesus Christ.

In *verses 1-2* Paul quotes or alludes to *Leviticus 26:44* and the covenant curses in the holiness code of *Leviticus*. Moses says if the Jews break God's covenant which he made with them at Mt. Sinai then even if God sends his people into exile and almost destroys them because of their sin yet he will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and preserve a remnant of his people. He will bring them out of exile and back to the land God swore to give them. The context of the *Leviticus* passage is God's punishment on Israel for breaking his covenant and disobeying his commands. God says he will send them away from the land in punishment until the land has enjoyed its Sabbath rest. When they repent and have paid for their sins God will remember them and bring them back to the land. The precise language in *Leviticus 26:44* is: *I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord.*

God saved a remnant in Elijah's day; he saved a faithful remnant in Isaiah's day and in Jeremiah's, all times when Israel had fallen away from God and had rejected him by disobeying his covenant. Paul says the same is true now; God has saved a faithful remnant of Jews as Messiah's people. No wonder Paul is in anguish over his people. They wait for centuries for Messiah to come. He finally comes. Paul knows this but his people reject Jesus and the gospel. Why, *Romans 9-11* is Paul's answer. When Paul wrote this he could not know how complete their rejection of Jesus would be or God's punishment in history on them for rejecting their Messiah. I am more convinced than ever the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 was God's doing because the Jews had rejected Jesus and would not believe his sacrifice for sin on the cross but continued to offer animal sacrifices on the temple's altar as if they could pay for sin. The price for sin had been paid in the death of the Messiah, God's One and Only Son. God would not allow that sacrifice to be continually rejected and demeaned by his own people who should have known better. Did Paul sense something was going to happen if the Jews continued to reject Jesus? Is that part of the reason he was in anguish over his people?

11:7-10 - Paul once again expresses the mystery of election and the consequences of our free choices. Israel sought salvation in God through works of the Law. It did not obtain it because no one will be saved through the Law. Jesus made this plain to the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan. When Paul says Israel he means communal Israel, the people. But, the elect of God found salvation through the grace of our Lord Jesus. The elect is the remnant of *11:1-6*. Luke used language in *Acts* about those destined to life heard the gospel and believed. Here Paul implies the same thing and then says the rest were hardened. He implies that God hardened the hearts of the Jews who did not believe in Jesus as Messiah and so they rejected him and could not be saved because they tried to find a relationship with God through keeping the Law. They failed!

Paul, as he has often done throughout these three chapters in discussing the problem of the unbelief of the Jews, quotes several Scriptures to support his case. He quotes first from *Deuteronomy 29:4* and *Isaiah 29:10*. The two passages are similar and Paul may be combining elements of both. He adds the line, to this very day, to the quote. The idea is God blinded the eyes and stopped the ears of a sinful Israel so they would not hear or see what God wanted them to do. This is a picture of God hardening their hearts. He follows this quote with a quote from *Psalms 69*, a *Psalms* of deliverance from one's enemies in a time of trouble and attack. The Psalmist cries out for judgment against his enemies that God may trap them and keep their eyes from seeing. Paul applies it in a more general way that God has blinded the eyes of Israel to keep them from seeing Jesus as the Messiah. He has hardened their hearts against the Lord. The problem we have with these verses is that Paul makes it sound as if unbelieving Israel had no choice. God hardened their hearts and kept them from believing. What about their free will? Ultimately this is a chicken or egg kind of situation. Which came first God hardening the hearts of unbelieving Jews or unbelieving Jews rejecting Jesus as Messiah and persisting in trying to earn the righteousness of God through the Law? One has to answer both did at the same time and hold up both sides of the tension. Yet here Paul clearly emphasizes God hardening the hearts of unbelieving Israel. Is God then not gracious? Of course he is for he has preserved a remnant of Jews who believe in Jesus in order to honor his promises to his people. We don't like hearing God hardened someone's heart because it isn't fair; they didn't have a choice for who can resist God? Yet since when is grace fair? Grace rewards someone who did not deserve it with the righteousness of God simply through faith in Jesus Christ? How is that fair? We must remember

here that Paul is emphasizing God's actions in the unbelief of the Jews. He never says that God has removed their freedom from them or they do not have a choice or can never repent. The whole section makes us nervous however because it points to how little we have to do with our salvation! We make a choice in the context of God choosing us!

11:11-16 - If God chose the Jews as his people and he has hardened them so that they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah did they stumble over Jesus so as to be beyond recovery? Is there hope for the Jews and why did God allow it? The Jews rejected Jesus and in so doing opened the way for the Gentiles to believe and be saved! They sinned and the Gentiles were offered the riches of God's salvation. Paul asks if their rejection-sin brought salvation for the world what will their fullness-belief bring? He adds God used Israel's sin and the Gentiles' acceptance of Jesus to make Israel jealous! They should be experiencing the benefits of the Kingdom's life; forgiveness, eternal life and especially the Holy Spirit. Instead they are on the outside looking in and the Gentiles experience these things that are by rights Israel's for the promises are theirs. However, the promises of God come through faith in Jesus and the Jews will not submit and believe in Jesus as Messiah, therefore they do not experience his promises as yet.

It sounds here as if Paul thought the Jews would come to faith in his lifetime. However, he didn't live long enough to see the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the temple. I have come to believe that the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the temple was God's judgment on the Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the wiping out of all the major Jewish sects except the Pharisees, they codified their tradition and Law and moved further and further away from their Christian brothers and sisters. They confirmed in practice and theology what Paul says here in *Romans 11*. Their rejection of Jesus grew stronger not weaker after 70AD. Consequently the church grew increasingly Gentile in character.

Yet Paul hopes his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles would bring some of his people to Jesus and salvation. The *Book of Acts* gives evidence that Paul was successful in this. In almost every city where he planted a church there were some Jews who believed. All of Paul's churches were mixed Jew and Gentile. The church in Rome to whom he writes was the same kind of church even though Paul had not founded it.

In *verse 15* Paul sounds as if he anticipates the Jews' acceptance of Jesus at the 2nd coming and the resurrection. Life from the dead is probably a reference to the resurrection in the last days. Reconciliation has already happened in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That has come to the Gentiles because the Jews as a people rejected their Messiah. What happens when they accept him? It will be resurrection day!

In *verse 16* he says if the remnant of the Jews is holy then the whole people are holy to God. There are two ways to take this verse. If the root is holy (the Jews) then the branches are holy (the Gentiles). Or, the root is holy (the remnant) so the branches are holy (those who still don't believe that Jesus is Messiah). Either may be Paul's meaning here but in context he is talking about the Jews. He doesn't bring in the Gentiles until *verse 17*. Paul uses holy here as set apart for God rather than holy conduct or righteousness. His argument is similar to what he says in *1 Corinthians 7* that a believer's children are holy, not because they as yet believe but because at least one of the parents believes. They belong to the Lord. A parent's faith does not guarantee salvation of their children but they are under the promises and protection of the Lord. I think Paul is applying the same principle to all the Jews whether they believe in Jesus or not. They are still God's people and are under his promises and protection. God will preserve at least a remnant

no matter what happens to the people as a whole. History has born that out even up to the present day.

11:17-24 - Paul now speaks to the Gentile believers in Rome. They should not boast about their salvation thinking that they are superior to their Jewish brothers and sisters who have rejected the Lord Jesus. The Gentiles are like wild olive branches that have been grafted into the great tree. They draw their nourishment from the roots; the promises of God in the gospel originally given to the Jews. The root supports the branches and not the other way around because salvation is from the Jews. Jesus says the same thing to the woman at the well in *John 4:22*. Paul implies that we should grieve for those Jews who have rejected Jesus, for their "*branches*" have been broken off so that we Gentiles could be grafted into the tree of God's people! They were broken off because of their unbelief and we have been grafted in because of our faith. We have nothing to boast about or feel superior about. See Jesus' words in *John 15* about the vine and the branches and those branches that don't bear fruit are cut off for fuel for the fire. Paul concludes, do not therefore be arrogant but tremble in fear, because if God did not spare his own people because of their unbelief neither will he spare you. It is by grace alone through faith alone that we are saved! See *Hebrews 12:25-29* about the consequences of unbelief.

Paul invites his readers to consider the kindness and sternness of God; kindness to us who believe and sternness to the Jews who have rejected Jesus even though they were part of God's people. His whole argument is predicated on the fact that belief in and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Messiah is the *ONLY* way of salvation God has provided. If the Jews are to be saved they must come through Jesus; there is no other way. He implies that even if at the present moment many have rejected Jesus if they repent and turn to him God is able to save them and graft them back into his people again. They are his people and how much easier it would be to graft them back into his people by faith and save them than we Gentiles who did not originally belong to the people of God.

One could make a case from what Paul says here in *Romans 11* that the Jews who have rejected Jesus as Messiah are still under the promises and protection of the Lord as his people but they are excluded from the salvation that comes through Jesus. They are holy to the Lord because they are part of his ancient people and God will continue to both discipline them to bring them to repentance and preserve them so that one day they may repent and believe in Jesus. In the meantime we Gentiles who accept Jesus as Lord have been included into the people of God by faith alone through Christ alone. We need to continue to pray and witness to our Jewish brothers and sisters in the hope that someday they may believe and be saved. If I am correct this is why God has preserved the Jews throughout the centuries even though they have rejected Jesus. Through the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, through the Middle Ages and persecution by the church, through the Nazi holocaust and even up to today in the modern state of Israel God continues to preserve and protect his ancient people in the hopes that they may repent and believe. He has not totally destroyed them in their unbelief but has always preserved a believing remnant of Jews in the church, his people.

11:25-27 - Paul gives the Romans his purpose in writing these chapters or at least *chapter 11*. He wants them to know God's hidden purpose, the mystery, in the hardening of unbelieving Jews so that the Gentile Christians in Rome will not be conceited in their faith in Jesus.

Israel has been hardened until the full number of Gentiles has come in, then all Israel will be saved. The verb for "*will be saved*" is a future passive indicative in Greek. Paul may be

referencing Jesus' words in *Luke 21:24* that Jerusalem will be trampled until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. When the number of Gentiles is filled up then Israel will fully turn to Christ and he will return, or it all happens at the time of his return. The nation will someday return to Jesus and proclaim him as Messiah!

This must be the sense of "*all Israel will be saved.*" Paul cannot mean that every Jew who ever lived will be saved because he has already made the case that they will not because most of them have rejected the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. He could mean the church as the true Israel made up of Jews and Gentiles. The difficulty in that view is that Paul has been talking specifically about the Jews and he would have to suddenly shift meanings in the middle of his argument. The most likely meaning is the conversion of the generation of the Jews who are living when Jesus returns, after the full number of the Gentiles have come in. God will have preserved a remnant of his ancient people throughout the "*time of the Gentiles*" until Jesus returns. When he comes the eyes of the generation of Jews who are living at that time will be opened and they "*will look on him whom they have pierced*" and believe. See *Zechariah 12:10*. Thus all Israel will be saved and Israel's hardening will have resulted in salvation for the Gentiles! Even this most likely meaning has problems. Paul's statement here is very difficult. His statement that all Israel will be saved however does not imply a different program of salvation for the Jews apart from Christ or apart from the Gentiles. All are saved through faith alone through Jesus Christ alone!

Paul uses segments from three passages, *Isaiah 59 and 27* and *Jeremiah 31*, to support his argument. The deliverer who will come from Zion is Jesus and he will turn Jacob away from idolatry and godlessness. He will make a covenant with them and take away their sins. All of this has been already accomplished by the Lord Jesus through his cross and resurrection. Paul is saying that when Israel is saved it will be through the work of their Messiah and what he has already done for them and not because they became zealous for the Law or became righteous through the Law. Remember, Paul had been a Pharisee and had believed that if Israel could keep the Law perfectly for even one day Messiah would come. Like all Pharisees he did not understand that we are saved by God's grace alone!

11:28-32 - At present the unbelieving Jews are enemies of the gospel. This had been born out in Paul's own life through the opposition and persecution of the Jews during his missionary travels. Paul would experience the greatest Jewish opposition to his ministry in the next several years after he left Corinth and headed for Jerusalem, the setting of his writing to the Roman church. Yet, as far as election is concerned, that is God's choice of them; the Jews are loved on account of the Patriarchs. Paul here refers to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to make them into a great nation and give them a land and through them bless the whole world. God has not forgotten his covenant with them. Plus God's gifts, Greek charismata, and his call are irrevocable. The Greek word means without repentance. Paul expresses the tension between the covenants of God that are outlined in the entire Old Testament. God had chosen the Jews in Abraham by grace. He made a covenant with them when he rescued them from slavery in Egypt and made them his people. That covenant was conditioned upon their obedience to him. The whole history of the Jews in the Old Testament is a record of God's grace versus their disobedience to his covenant. God punished them periodically to bring them to repentance, including the worst punishment of all in the exile. Yet God never rejected the Jews utterly because he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Paul is casting the current unbelief and rejection by the Jews of Jesus their Messiah in the same light. He says this is simply

a continuation of the age old tension in which the Jews have always lived. Yet in the end God will save his ancient people for the sake of the Patriarchs because he promised them he would do it. God always keeps his promises, even when we are disobedient! Paul says the Gentiles even have a role in Israel's salvation just as Israel had a role in theirs. Israel is disobedient now so that the Gentiles may receive mercy. Israel will one day receive mercy because of the mercy shown the Gentiles now. It is all part of God's plan because all have sinned. All people, Jew and Gentile alike have been consigned over to disobedience that God may have mercy upon all. The word for consigned or bound together in Greek means to shut up together; to bar the way. The way to heaven is shut. Only in Jesus Christ alone is there salvation that God may have mercy on sinners who repent and believe in him.

God will fulfill his covenant promises to Israel to save them from their sins. All throughout history there has been a small Jewish Christian remnant. When Christ returns that generation of Jews will be saved which will also be in fulfillment of his promises. In the meantime because of Israel's unbelief the Gentiles are being saved because when all Israel recognizes Jesus, he will have returned and history will be complete!

Paul is taking the larger view here of Israel as a people and not individual Israelites who reject or believe in Jesus. Think Hebrew here and the corporate-community view and not American and the individual.

11:33-36 - Paul closes out his section on the question of the Jews with a doxology of praise to God's wisdom and plan. This is also a fitting doxology to the entire first 11 chapters of *Romans*. In context it is the finale of *chapters 9-11*.

Paul exclaims how deep are the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. His judgments or decisions are unsearchable, meaning they cannot be comprehended. His paths or plans are beyond tracing out or following. Paul is saying that no one could have comprehended or predicted how God would use Israel to save the world, nor how he would send Jesus, nor how Israel's hardening would mean salvation for the Gentiles.

He quotes from *Isaiah 40* and asks who has known or understood the mind of the Lord or has been his counselor? He follows the *Isaiah* quote with a quote from *Job 41*, asking if anyone has ever given anything to God so that God owed someone something. The obvious answer is no one. Who counsels God? To whom does God owe anything? God takes counsel in himself and because he is the Creator he owes his creatures nothing. We owe him everything; life and breath and being! We can say we don't like something God did or is doing. We can say we don't understand it. But no human being can ever make a claim that God owes them anything! No human being can challenge God's actions as immoral or wanting. He is the Creator! We are his creatures and he has the right to do with us as he chooses!

Paul concludes by saying that from him, through him and to him are all things. Here he speaks of God as the Creator. In *Colossians 1* he will use the same kind of language and apply it to Christ. God/Christ is the origin (from him); the agent (through him); and the goal of creation (to him)! He is the all in all! *Colossians 1*, *Hebrews 1* and *Acts 17* say the Lord Jesus is also the sustainer of creation; he holds it together and keeps it in existence. Paul is stating his case that God the Creator has the right to do with his creation as he chooses and human beings are in no position to criticize or challenge that right. God is sovereign and we are his creatures. From that perspective our sinful rebellion is the height of arrogance and foolishness and God's grace is a mystery we will never fully fathom.

Chapter 12:

12:1-2 - Paul begins the next section of his letter with a “*therefore*”. If all of what he has written is true then this is the logical conclusion. Here is what the individual believer in Rome needs to do. I urge you or exhort you, in Greek a present active indicative, to present or offer your bodies as living sacrifices or offerings to God. The verb for offer is an aorist infinitive which carries the force here of an imperative. Paul begins with a command or exhortation to present ourselves to God as worship.

The NIV translates the preposition *dia* in Greek, which is normally translated as through, as in view of, which can mean, because of. A better translation takes the *dia* as instrumental, by means of. That changes the meaning. Offer yourselves by means of God's grace not because of it. Both are possible and maybe both need to be emphasized. I prefer “by means of” because it highlights the idea that my obedience and sacrifice to God are dependent upon him. Offer myself not because of what Christ has done for me but by means of what he has done and is doing.

Paul calls believers to continually offer their bodies to God as a living offering or sacrifice. He is returning to a theme he wrote about in *chapter 6*, that our spirits are alive because of Christ even though our bodies are subject to sin and death because of sin. The issue is who is our master now? Sin's power in us is broken and I no longer have to submit to sin. I am now free not to sin. However, if I submit to my body's desires and follow them I will still sin because in my body I still want to sin. The conflict is over who is in charge and who is Lord. Paul goes right to the heart of the conflict within us when he exhorts us to offer our bodies to God as an offering. My body still wants to sin but because of Christ I no longer have to submit to sin in my body because it is no longer my master; Jesus is! Paul is showing us how we can defeat sin in our lives and live holy before God. A Greek would not think offering his or her body was spiritual at all! The body was of the earth, of the world and was the thing one got rid of at death to allow the spirit to be free. But Paul reflects a biblical-Hebrew understanding of human nature that we are a unity of body and spirit and God desires our obedience at our most basic human level: our bodies. We are to offer them because Jesus has hallowed them by taking on human form at his incarnation. All parts of us are to be submitted to God. Because of what Jesus has done and through the power that comes to us by the Holy Spirit living in us we can offer our bodies to him. All our desires, human frailties, weaknesses and strengths we can offer to him. He will transform them all! As C.S. Lewis says at the end of *Mere Christianity*, nothing that is not submitted to Christ and to death will ever be raised from the dead.

We do not offer ourselves as a dead offering or an offering of atonement, once and for all, but a continual living offering of thanksgiving and praise to God. Nor do we offer an animal as a substitute; we offer ourselves because Jesus has made us holy and acceptable to God through his death and resurrection! When we offer our bodies, meaning all of us, and submit them to Christ in thanksgiving and worship we bring our entire person under Jesus' lordship each moment and sin will no longer reign in us. We will be transformed into people who are like Jesus.

Verse 2 begins, do not be squeezed into the world's mold but be transformed, Greek *metamorpho'ō* (from which we get the word metamorphosis, a present passive participle meaning continuous action), by the renewing of your mind. To conform to the world means to be molded by the world and formed like the world or to be guided by the world. The process of transformation begins with what I think. It begins with who I choose to follow every moment of every day. As Lewis observes in *Mere Christianity* the critical moment every day is right at the beginning, when my old sinful self wants to be in charge and for me to follow its agenda. At that

moment I have a choice. I can choose to shove it all back and take up Jesus' agenda for me. I can choose to submit myself, all myself, body and soul to Jesus Christ and let him be Lord. I choose to let Jesus guide my day and my thinking and not follow sin that day. When I do and walk in his Spirit he changes me by renewing me. He transforms me into a person who can not only know his will but do it. My thinking is the key, so that I can test out, or prove out what God's will is in my life.

Paul is brilliant here in these opening verses of *Romans 12*. He diagnoses the problem in our Christian walk and locates the most critical component of the battle over whose direction I will follow every day. He gives us the way to win that battle by submitting our bodies which want to sin to Jesus. When I do I experience sin's power being broken in me and I overcome through the power of Christ in me. I *DO* the will of God!

12:3-8 - The grace that was given to Paul is the grace of his apostleship. Paul is appealing to his readers using his apostolic authority. He has outlined our response as individuals to God, to present ourselves as living offerings to God. Now Paul tells us how we need to respond to one another in the body of Christ as a result of what the Lord Jesus has done for us. God has saved us into a community of faith, into the family of God by grace. Because it is by grace, we need to think of ourselves with humility and think of one another in the same way as well. If we were saved by works we could boast about something and consider ourselves superior and righteous while seeing others as wanting and sinful. Paul had practiced such behavior as a Pharisee. Now however he has been saved apart from any merit of his own wholly by the mercies of God. That leads to looking at oneself with sober judgment; meaning making an honest appraisal of oneself, knowing one's weaknesses and strengths. Paul tells us there is no place for pride in the body of Christ! The more mature I am in Christ, and the more my faith grows the more accurate my self-appraisal will be.

Paul then uses the body analogy for the church as God's people for the first time in *Romans*. He had used it when he wrote the Corinthians some three years before from Ephesus. Now he is wintering in Corinth on his way to Jerusalem and he hopes eventually Rome. Perhaps it is no accident that he returns to his body analogy as a description of the church because he is in the city where he used it to great effect. A human body has many members or parts. So it is with Christ's body the church. We are an integrated whole through the Holy Spirit who dwells in each believer. We the many are one. We belong to one another. The Greek idiom is difficult. NASB translates the phrase, "*and individually members one of another.*" The NLT and NIV translate the phrase, "*and we all belong to one another*" and "*each member belongs to all the others.*" I think the NLT and NIV have captured Paul's meaning here. We are all interconnected not because of what we have done but because of what God has done through us. We are one body and because we are one body we belong to one another. Even if I don't care for someone, if they are in Christ then they are part of the body and I belong to them just as they belong to me. God has put us together and I have no right to separate from them.

The Holy Spirit who indwells every believer has bound us together in a supernatural fellowship of his making so that we are parts of a greater whole. We do not lose our individuality within this fellowship but we are not isolated agents either. Together we create something greater than our individual lives. Because of the Spirit's work we become something greater than the sum of our parts. We become the body of Christ, the ongoing physical presence of Jesus upon the earth through the ministry of the Spirit in us both individually and corporately.

That ministry is expressed through us when we use the grace-gifts the Spirit gives to each of us. I don't choose which gift or gifts I receive, God does. This reflects what Paul said at the end of *chapter 11*, who has been God's counselor and given him advice? He knows best how his body needs to work and which person needs what gift so the whole body functions together.

The gifts operate by faith. Paul then lists several gifts. Paul knows many people in Rome as *chapter 16* testifies, but he did not found the church nor had he ever been with them. Therefore his list here has to be representative of the various gifts the Spirit gives the church. It is not exhaustive. That is also reinforced by the fact that the list here in *Romans 12* is different from the two lists in *1 Corinthians 12*. The gifts Paul lists here are ministries people can carry out both inside and outside the body and they all express part of the ministry of Christ. The implication is when we all use our gifts as God has given them the whole ministry of Christ is present again in the world through the power and work of the Holy Spirit in us. Paul also implies that our ability to utilize the Spirit's gifts to us is progressive. As our faith, confidence and experience in ministry grows so will our ability to utilize what the Spirit has given us and that ministry will be more effective. We should expect our gifts to bear more fruit the more we use them.

Paul then describes several of the gifts. Prophecy, or proclaiming or declaring God's Word is first. He says if you have the gift of prophecy use it in proportion to your faith. As your faith grows so will your ministry as a prophet. Service is next or *diakonia*, waiting at tables. We get the word deacon from this word. It is the antithesis of prophecy because servants do not preach God's Word they serve people yet they model Jesus' example of servanthood and thereby proclaim Jesus' ministry by actions. The next gift Paul mentions is teaching. Jesus was a teacher and the Holy Spirit has ensured that his teaching ministry will be present in his body by gifting certain people with his ability. We cannot learn to be his disciples without teachers who help us understand what it means to follow Jesus. Encouraging is the next gift in Paul's list. The word is a two-edged word meaning both exhort someone to greater effort and to comfort someone in times of stress and need. I wonder if Paul thought of Barnabas when he thought of someone with the gift of encouragement. One sees from Barnabas' life how vital this gift is in Christ's body. Giving or contributing to the needs of others is the next gift. The word means great giving. Paul says one should do it with liberality. Literally the word means simplicity, sincerity, without any self-seeking. Givers give for the sake of others not to attract any attention to themselves. They demonstrate the extraordinary generosity of God! Leadership is the next gift Paul describes. Literally the word means to rule and is probably related to the role of elder or pastor though leadership can be exercised in a variety of ministries. The adjective Paul connects with leadership is diligence or zeal. Leaders need to work hard. Mercy is the last gift Paul mentions in his list of grace-gifts, or *charismata* in Greek. Mercy or showing mercy is a gift that reflects the compassion of Jesus to hurting people. We are to exercise this gift cheerfully, literally with hilarity, the same word Paul uses in describing the kind of giver God loves in *2 Corinthians 9*. People who show mercy are often ministering to people in horrific circumstances. Paul says they need to show God's mercy to people and yet stay grounded in the joy of God and bring some of that joy to those who hurt.

All these gifts express some part of God, some part of Jesus and his ministry and character. When we exercise our gifts Jesus is present in the church through them. When we don't the body is incomplete and its ministry is incomplete. Because we are connected to one another when we refuse to learn and use our gifts we hurt one another; we hurt Christ who gave them and we hurt the world which desperately needs the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

12:9-13 - Paul has described how we can use our spiritual gifts to build up the church and demonstrate to the world the ministry of Christ. Now he turns to how we should treat one another as members of Jesus' body and also how we should treat those who do not know Christ. These moral guidelines that Paul outlines are not rules that we must follow in order to please God. They are the natural fruit of walking in the Spirit and submitting ourselves daily to God as living sacrifices. These are the things that occur in us when our minds are transformed by the Spirit. These actions and attitudes reflect the actions and attitudes of the Lord Jesus. As such they are a good measuring rod to see how well we are being transformed as a church into a people that reflect Jesus' and his character.

Love, Greek *agape*, is first. He says the same thing in *1 Corinthians 13*. Paul says love is the fulfillment of the law in *Romans 13*. He will tell the Colossians in *Colossians 3* that above all else put on love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. Love reflects the character of Christ. Our love must be sincere. The word is *anupokritos*, meaning without hypocrisy. We can't fake the love of Christ! It has to come from him and flow through us. Don't fake your love for one another, let it be genuine. Paul knows that unless God loves people through us we won't love them.

We are to hate what is evil. The word means abhor it, dislike it intensely, have a horror of it. This is the attitude of holiness. That which is evil repulses God. We need to have that same attitude. However, it is not just a negative attitude towards evil we need; we also need to have a positive attitude towards that which is good. We are to cling to, hold on to, or be glued to that which is good. The word is related to the word Paul uses in *Ephesians 5:31* when he quotes *Genesis 2:24* when a man leaves his father and mother and is united (related word) to his wife. We need to be married and glued to that which is good. Why, because God is light and there is no darkness in him at all!

Paul says we need to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. That kind of love is *philadelphia*, friendship and family love. The word for devotion that Paul uses here is the devotion of a family to one another. In other words Paul is telling us that we need to love each other as brothers and sisters of God's family. Families are devoted to one another no matter what happens. Families stick together and help each other and are there for one another. Paul says that is how we need to be in the body of Christ. We are family! That attitude should be especially evident in Christian families. It should be most visible in a Christian home as an example of how the whole church should treat each other.

Out of that love and devotion to one another we honor one another above ourselves. We encourage one another. We are humble towards one another. We seek to elevate our brothers and sisters above ourselves. We don't need the spotlight but want to shine it on our brothers and sisters so they can receive honor. This attitude reflects the Trinity. Jesus said his goal was to bring glory to his Father. Paul says the Father wants to bring glory to his Son. John tells us the Spirit's heart is to glorify Jesus, the Son. Each Person of the Trinity seeks to bring glory to the others. We are to be the same way! We are to be like God!

Paul says in *verse 11* that we are to never lack in zeal, but be fervent in our service to the Lord. Literally the words read: "*diligent not lazy be in your spiritual fervor.*" Paul is talking about the attitude we need as we serve one another and the Lord. We need to be fervent not lazy. The word refers to boiling water, bubbling with heat. Jesus served the Lord with singular focus and we need to do the same. In fact when we walk with him and submit to him this is the kind of attitude his Spirit will produce in us. Another way to express this is we need to serve the Lord

with excellence, always giving our best to him and never just doing enough to get by. He deserves the best we have to give!

Be joyful in hope means despite circumstances celebrate with the joy of the Lord. Joy is dependent upon my relationship with Jesus because it is part of the Spirit's fruit in me and God's character growing in me. I can be joyful in Christ no matter what is happening around me! When I am full of his joy it leads to being full of the hope God gives me as well. Be patient in affliction means to know that God is working even when we can't see him. Trust God to bring us through. We need to trust in the promise Paul has already given us in *Romans 8:28*, God will work all things for our good. We are to be faithful in prayer. The word means to be steadfast, to persevere and not give up. Keep praying! We are to not give up praying and lifting up our needs to our Heavenly Father. We need to cooperate with God to see his will done in our body as it is done in heaven! Pray for his Kingdom to come! Paul says we must work to not give up praying or be discouraged when we don't see our prayers answered immediately. Keep on praying! God is working even when we can't see him. That is a great lesson for us as a church and why we must not give up on monthly prayer gatherings. We need to be as zealous for praying as we are in serving the Lord!

Literally the first phrase of *verse 13* reads: "*the needs of the saints share together (koinoneo).*" We share in common our needs. When one has a need we all have a need and share with one another to meet it. All we have is God's and is at his disposal to meet all our needs together. Out of that *koinonia* we are to practice hospitality. Practice hospitality means we open our homes to each other, help each other and provide for one another's needs because this is God's character. This is what Jesus is like and we are to be Jesus to one another. The word translated practice means to pursue, to seek after eagerly. Hospitality is literally the love of strangers. We share not only with those we know but with those we don't know. This speaks of an attitude toward the guest and the new person that we treat them like family. We welcome them and if they have a need we share with them to meet it. We do this because that is how Jesus is; that is his character.

In these five verses Paul outlines the attitudes we need to have as a church for ministry to the community and for our life together as a body. If we put these things into practice throughout our church by the power of the Spirit in us we would see extraordinary love and effectiveness in ministry. This does not happen programmatically but through abiding and walking with the Spirit who lives in us. But, these attitudes are also the things the Spirit wants to produce in us. These verses are a good test for our body to see if we collectively are following Christ and walking with him!

12:14-21 - Paul continues in *verses 14-21* to describe what walking in the Spirit, letting God transform us and using our spiritual gifts in service to one another will produce in the body. These attitudes and actions are a continuation of what he outlines in *verses 9-13*.

We are a body together and because we belong to one another; because we are to love one another with genuine love and affection, we need to get along with one another. This applies especially to those within the church but also to those outside. Those who oppose us, we bless. We do not retaliate, we bless. We ask for God's favor on people. Literally the word for bless in Greek means to speak well of. That is a good description of how we are to act towards those who persecute us or oppose us. Too often we want to vilify people who oppose us, especially in the church. Paul calls us here to the attitude that Jesus calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 5-7*.

When a brother or sister is in pain, especially with grief and loss, we come alongside and share the pain and bear it with them. We cannot take the pain away but we can stand with them and identify with them. When a brother or sister rejoices, we celebrate with them. What happens to them happens to us because we are connected in one body! Paul describes a way of being together that recognizes a profound connection between people that we as Americans have a hard time understanding or grasping. We are so used to being individuals and being and doing things on our own. Here Paul describes body life as being connected to others in the church as a family. We are connected whether we would have chosen these people as friends or not. God has chosen us for one another.

Live in harmony with one another means to have the same mind together. It isn't so much that we all think alike as robots but we share the same worldview, same values and goals. We share the mind of Christ together and when we do it produces harmony among us. This is what the Spirit's gifts produce in us when we use them to their greatest effect. They produce the character, love and life of God among us! The church grows not as an organization but as an organism. The body prospers and grows because its parts are working together for its health and growth.

We are to have the attitude of Jesus. When someone wrongs us we do not wrong them back. Christians must never react out of a tit for tat mindset. We need to think ahead and respond to people with what is right to do rather than retaliate to protect our pride or position. Paul is not saying be a politician by testing what everyone wants and then doing that. He tells us to respond with right and good behavior towards others even when they wrong us. Paul tells us to let the Spirit be in charge of our thinking and reacting to people. When we are submitted to him and offer ourselves to him he changes our thinking and grows his fruit in us. We cannot divorce Paul's imperatives in these paragraphs of *Romans 12* from his indicatives, his statements of what God has done for us and how the Spirit now lives in us. We will never fulfill the former without the latter.

Paul teaches us in *verse 18* that we must do everything we can to live at peace with people so that there is no ongoing conflict, unforgiveness or bitterness between us and someone else. He also recognizes that there are those who do not want peace, just as Jesus experienced. We must do our part so we can say in all good conscience I did the best I could to get along with that person. We are not responsible for someone else's behavior; we are responsible for our own. If someone does not want peace with us and we have done everything we can we must let it go; pray for them and wait patiently in hope that something will change in the relationship and we can be reconciled.

Verses 19-21 sum up the attitude we must have. As Christ-followers we are not to take revenge or judgment on someone. That is God's job alone. When someone harms us we are not to try and harm them back, but leave them to God. Paul quotes *Deuteronomy 32:35* in support, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*" Paul follows that quote with another from *Proverbs 25:21-22* because it expresses the antithesis to retaliation and vengeance. We are to respond to our enemies and those who want to do evil to us with love and care. If they are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty give them a drink. The difficult part of the *Proverbs* quote is the last line. "*In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head.*" What does that mean? Some have tried to link that line with a practice of keeping the fires lit in people's homes. If the fire in the hearth went out people would walk around needing coals from others' fireplaces to re-start their own fire. That is possible but there is no good scriptural support for it. The problem is it sounds as if treating our enemies with kindness and love heaps a fiery judgment upon their

heads! In the Old Testament, especially in the Wisdom Writings of *Job*, *Psalms* and *Proverbs* the concept of burning coals is always associated with judgment. I think what Paul is saying in his *Proverbs* quote here in *Romans 12* is to treat an enemy with kindness because that is much more likely to bring him to repentance than retaliation will. The kindness you show him will heap conviction and judgment upon him and when he comes before the judgment seat of Christ he will have no defense. God will repay him for how he treated you. Leave the judgment and punishment to God. Besides, there is always a chance that your kindness may lead him to repentance. And then rather than an enemy you will have gained a brother or sister!

Paul sums up the way we are to treat those who oppose us and are hurtful to us. Don't be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good. Good is stronger than evil. We are to demonstrate that fact in our behavior towards others. Jesus came humbly and in weakness. The world and those in power saw him as weak and unable to defend himself. When they put him on the cross they thought they had defeated him. But Jesus overcame their evil with good because the cross was God's plan for our salvation. That which God's enemies thought was his defeat turned into his greatest victory. On a smaller scale we are to treat others in the same way and act towards those who desire to harm us as Jesus did. In the short term it may cost us great pain and even our lives. But in the long run it will work out for the plan of God. Living and acting this way demands faith and trust in God. He knows best and he is able to use all things for our good and for his purposes, even evil people. Remember as Paul said at the end of *chapter 11*, from him and through him and to him are all things. *Romans 12* is Paul's description of how we are to live out that truth through the power of the Holy Spirit in us both individually and corporately as a church.

Chapter 13:

13:1-5 - As a general rule Christians are to submit themselves to the governing authorities. In Paul's day that was the Roman emperor which was Nero when Paul wrote *Romans*. Paul says all governing authorities have been instituted by God and given their authority by God. God has provided human government in order to maintain order and to be a check on evil behavior. Believers therefore need to be law abiding citizens.

If you rebel against the government you rebel against God-established authority. That will incur judgment upon you. Does that mean if I rebel against the government I rebel against God? These verses were used to establish the so-called divine right of kings. God had established the king and rebelling against the king was rebelling against God. It may be too fine a point but Paul does not actually say that. He says if we rebel, we rebel against the governmental authority God has established and not God himself. Otherwise to rebel against Hitler would have been to rebel against God. That is repugnant morally. However, rebellion against authority is a serious offense in God's sight, especially when the government is acting according to God's design.

Verse 3 points out that those in authority hold no terror for those who do right but only wrongdoers. Governments have the power of the sword from God to punish wrongdoers and not those who do right. So do right and no harm will come to you and the government will leave you alone. This is a curious statement from Paul given the Roman church to which he is writing. In 49 Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome over riots about "Chrestus" or Christ. Priscilla and Aquila had fled to Corinth because of the edict. Innocent Jews were caught up in the order along with guilty ones. Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome hosting a house church by the time Paul writes *Romans* according to *Romans 16*. There must have been other Jewish Christians who had been victims of Claudius' edict. How did they view Paul's statements here? Yet Paul

would use this principle of the good not having to fear the governing authorities to appeal to Caesar and be taken to Rome where he wanted to go when the Sanhedrin falsely accused him and their plot to kill Paul was exposed. He had done nothing wrong and did not fear being handed over to Caesar's government. Paul used this principle for his own defense. However, 8-10 years later he would be arrested by Nero and put to death for sedition against Caesar. The argument would come full circle in Paul's life. What would Paul have said if he was writing *Romans* in the time of Nero's persecution of Christians? What would he have written if he had lived as long as John and had experienced Domitian's persecution of Christians for preaching the gospel and refusing to confess that Caesar was Lord because only Jesus was Lord? John's attitude toward the Roman emperor and government is very different than Paul's here. The Bible is not univocal on this issue. However, if the government is functioning then Paul's counsel is godly and right. It is when governments turn tyrannical that questions arise.

This whole idea of the divine institution of governments by God and rebelling against authority was rebellion against God was a very difficult issue for those who led the American Revolution and American Christians of the time. They raised the question if the constituted authority by God rewards the wrong and punishes the right had it abdicated its authority? They answered that question, yes. Therefore Americans had the right to rebel against King George because he was no longer under God's sanction as the duly constituted government. Many others like the Tories said no. He was still the king and people owed him their allegiance. Rebellion was a sin. Paul's counsel here becomes very difficult when dealing with an unjust and oppressive government. Nevertheless it cannot be ignored because it is the Word of God to us.

13:6-7 - Paul takes his case for obeying the government because its authority has been given to it by God one step further. Pay your taxes. Christians should pay their taxes because duly authorized governments are God's servants. If you owe someone pay them. Taxes, fees, respect or honor, give to all their due. Questions of conscience butt up against this general principle but for everyday affairs pay your taxes. If the government used my taxes to pay for forced abortions would I be justified to still pay my taxes? Here Jesus' principle is applicable. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. All things ultimately are God's therefore God's calling and direction are the highest and I must obey God before all things even government. This whole section of *Romans 13* is a passage where Scripture must help us interpret Scripture.

Paul gives us wise counsel and advice for us as believers when it comes to governing authorities in this passage. But he does not have the last word on the whole issue. We need to look at Jesus' words plus Israel's prophets when they were speaking to unjust and idolatrous kings. Those passages can apply to this question as well.

13:8-10 - Owe a debt to no one is literally how the first line of *verse 8* reads. We can apply this to read pay your debts. Paul does not say never go into debt. He says pay the debts you have. There is a difference. However, the borrower can be a slave to the lender and we need to be careful to not be over our heads in debt because then our creditors are in control and not the Lord Jesus. The truest "*debt*" we have to everyone is to love them as our neighbor. Love is the fulfillment of the Law and the Holy Spirit in us has been given to us to grow God's love in our hearts for God and for everyone. Paul is emphasizing our ongoing obligation to love others here rather than give financial advice. Owe a debt to no one is sound financial counsel but the sentences that follow point to love and the obligation to love rather than pay off your debts.

Paul says the summary of the Law of Moses as it applies to how we treat each other is love. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, from *Leviticus 19:18*. Jesus said this was the second greatest commandment. Paul reinforces Jesus' teaching about love here in *Romans 13*.

If you love someone you will only do what is right and best for them and never do anything that will harm them. That includes tough love. The word for harm can also mean evil. Sometimes what is best will cause temporary pain just like God had to discipline Israel. But enabling behavior is ultimately more harmful to a person than saying no to them and hurting their feelings while allowing them to bear the consequences of their own bad choices so that they will come to repentance. Paul is not arguing against love with wisdom and discipline. He is saying love does not harm, wound or do evil to another. That is why violence of any kind in a relationship is not love! Our example of love is the Lord Jesus. He was not afraid to confront spiritual pride and hypocrisy when he saw it, especially in the Pharisees. But he could also be gentle and encouraging to people who were bound in sin. He wanted to set them free like the woman at the well in *John 4*.

13:11-14 - Why is being free from debt and loving others so important? Jesus is coming back! Paul expresses the already-not yet tension of the New Testament. The Kingdom of God is already here in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the salvation offered to us in Jesus Christ. But it is not yet fulfilled. Jesus has taken up his Messianic reign in heaven but it is not yet fully recognized on earth. There is coming a day when it will be! That day is getting nearer and nearer. It is closer now than when we first believed. The principle still holds today. The nearness of Jesus' coming should spur us on to moral living. Do things that can be done in the light and not hidden in the darkness.

Paul says we need to put on the armor of light or the armor of God which he will describe in more detail in *Ephesians 6*. The culture of Paul's day was filled with orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and all kinds of debauchery, dissension and jealousy. Our culture today exhibits those same traits. How are we to live in the midst of such a culture as Christians? Those immoral deeds are often done in the darkness where they are hidden from view. We need to act as if we are in the daylight, in plain sight of others where we would not do such things. We need to cast off the immorality of our former lifestyles, like casting off old or dirty clothes. Instead we are to put on Christ, walk with him, abide in him and not even think about how to gratify our fleshly, sinful desires. Paul returns to the opening theme of *Romans 12*, be transformed by the renewing of our minds!

Chapter 14:

14:1-4 - Paul frames this whole section on judging others by limiting it to disputable matters (NIV). NRSV says opinions; NLT says what they think is right or wrong and NASB says opinions. The Greek word means a dispute or argument. Paul is not talking about judging someone or holding someone accountable over what is clearly God's will like in the Ten Commandments or something Jesus commanded us. This is not about holding someone accountable over an issue of sin. The issues he raises are all about what someone eats or the day they worship or things of that sort. They are what I call scruples, rules, do's and don'ts. Our problem is we too often label these things as sinful and put them on the same level as violating the Lord's will when they do not. Our temptation is to judge people over these things as if they are central rather than encourage people to mature and get beyond those issues. We are not the

ultimate authority, Jesus is! Whether they are a good Christian is not about whether they are vegan or not or worship on Saturday or have a tattoo.

God has accepted us and forgiven us and we must do the same. Each believer is God's servant and we are in no position to determine whether someone is acceptable to God over what they eat or what kind of music they like or on what day they worship. When we judge other Christians over scruples we major on the minors and have lost perspective over what is truly important. Disputes over worship days or church music or what kind of foods we eat are all arguments over scruples. Paul is telling the Romans not to argue over minor things and divide the body over issues that in the end are irrelevant!

Why does Paul even address this issue in his letter to the Roman church? There are two possibilities. First, this issue was an issue Paul encountered across the church in many cities and he includes it here as general counsel to the church. Second, Paul had heard about some of the issues that were disturbing the Roman church, this being one of them, and he writes to help the situation. Both are equally possible and both may be true.

14:5-8 - The whole concept of judging/condemning others is over disputable matters. Outright false teaching and clear immorality is one thing, scruples are another. Accountability and discipline need to come to bear in the former while much grace and leeway need to be used in the latter. Most often unfortunately, we judge people and condemn when we should be offering grace!

In *verse 6* Paul points to a dispute concerning which day one worships. He does not directly say the argument is over Saturday or Sunday but that makes the most sense. The Roman church was like many other churches in Paul's day, made up of Jews and Gentiles. There would have been a point of tension between Jews who had always worshipped on Saturdays and new Gentile believers who wanted to worship on the "*Lord's Day*", Sunday, the day he rose from the dead. It is likely some Jews also wanted to worship on Sundays or worship on both days. It is easy to see how this controversy could have become an argument that would have divided the church. For some Seventh Day Adventists today this issue continues to divide believers. The same is true of the controversy over eating meat, or meat sacrificed to idols or the kind of meat one eats, like pork. As more and more Gentiles came into the church Jewish Christians would have been uncomfortable with Gentile believers who ignored the dietary laws that the Jews had practiced for centuries. Underneath this entire debate is the issue of our freedom from the Law of Moses, especially the ceremonial laws. The Pharisees had majored on much of the ceremonial law and it was not easy for them to simply give up a lifetime of strict observance when they accepted Jesus as their Messiah. James hints at this when he tells Paul in *Acts 21* how many Jewish believers are zealous for the Law of Moses. We live on this side of the controversy and forget the radical changes faith in Jesus brought to our Jewish brothers and sisters in apostolic times. It is easy to see now how threatened they would feel as more and more Gentiles came into the church and their Jewish way of life was threatened to be swallowed up with new Gentile ways of behaving even though people were following the Jewish Messiah! In our day the whole vegan controversy in the church has a tendency to divide believers rather than bring them together.

How does one get beyond the issues and stay focused on what is truly important? Paul's summary gives us guidance on how to weather any arguments and disputes over scruples. Recovery groups often talk about being true to oneself; "*to thine own self be true*". Paul rejects that idea for the Christian. We need to be "*true*" to the Lord Jesus and our brothers and sisters in

Christ! We are the Lord's servants and we live for him. If we live we live for him and if we die we die for him. In life or death we belong to him! Paul brings our focus back to Jesus. If our focus is there and we are being transformed by him because we are submitted to him daily and walking in his Spirit, the places where we disagree over scruples will not divide us. Rather we will see each other as belonging to the Lord and release one another to be guided by the Spirit and our own consciences. We will leave the judging up to the Lord and accept one another in love. That is Paul's prescription for avoiding disputes over scruples.

14:9-12 - We belong to the Lord whether in life or in death. It is for that reason that Jesus died and rose again, that he would be Lord of all. His resurrection confirms his Lordship. Therefore I have no right to judge a fellow servant. They are not answerable to me; they are answerable to Christ because he is Lord and I am not. Paul quotes *Isaiah 45:23* in support which says every knee will bow and every tongue confess to God. He uses this same quote in support of the Lordship of Jesus in *Philippians 2*. Paul affirms in these verses that Jesus is God himself.

We will all have to give an account of our lives to God at the last judgment. This account for believers is probably at the judgment for rewards. What did we do with God's gifts and how did we obey him? He will reward us for our obedience even though we deserve nothing. Judgment for sin has already occurred at the cross. As Paul says in *Romans 8:1*, there is no condemnation left for those in Christ Jesus. God will not condemn me when he has already justified me and declared me righteous! It is difficult to outline exactly how the last judgment will take place because although Scripture affirms the event it does not give many details. Often the judgment of believers for rewards is seen as a separate event. It is possible if one can take Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats in *Matthew 25* somewhat literally that at the judgment believers and non-believers are separated. Then each is judged according to what they have done. Non-believers are condemned because they never submitted to Jesus' Lordship and receive what their deeds deserve. Believers are justified before God by their faith in the Lord Jesus and then are rewarded for their deeds of obedience and service to their Lord. The sequence is speculation but it seems reasonable given what Scripture tells us.

14:13-18 - Paul concludes, stop passing judgment on your brothers and sisters over matters of scruples. Don't put any stumbling block in the way of their faith. But, how is not putting a stumbling block in someone's way the opposite of judging them? Acting in love towards others gives me a moral sensitivity as to what is critical and what is peripheral. A selfish arrogant attitude considers my issues or scruples as most important and judges everyone accordingly. A gentle loving attitude realizes not everyone sees my "hot button" issues the same. I am sensitive to not confront someone over my scruples and judge them or blatantly flaunt my view as superior and cause them to stumble.

Why is Paul writing so much to the Romans about this issue since he had never been to this church? There are several possibilities: He knew many people in that church and had heard from them about the issues over which the church was struggling; among those would have been Priscilla and Aquila. Second, the Roman church was a long established church, one of the oldest in New Testament times, probably formed soon after Pentecost by Jewish Christians who had been in Jerusalem and then returned to Rome. It probably had a greater balance between Jews and Gentiles than many of Paul's churches and so the issues of food and worship days and other ceremonial issues (to the Jews) would have been more prevalent in the congregations in Rome.

Paul's counsel to the church is, do not allow what you consider to be good be spoken of as evil. We are not to put a stumbling block in the way of other brothers and sisters by judging them if they do something we would consider to be wrong according to our scruples. But we are to also stand up for what we believe is good and right as well and not just take someone's judgmental attitude and let the community think we are being cowed into submission or can't stand up to bullying by someone over what we know to not be sinful. This is the counterbalance to not causing someone to stumble. Don't allow someone to judge you over something which is not a Kingdom issue. Judging and causing someone to stumble are equally wrong because neither flow out of love for the other person and the community.

The Kingdom of God is not about rules and scruples! It is about God's character growing in us; it is about relationship! That is Paul's criteria for determining if something is a Kingdom issue or not. We must act in love towards one another. Love would never think of causing a brother offense or distress. Love is not proud and so is not bothered by accommodating a brother or sister over a matter of a scruple that my fellow believer finds offensive but I do not. We can be humble enough to adapt and not give offense. In our modern world where short term mission trips are possible this principle is very applicable to visiting another culture. As long as it does not violate the clear Word of God for love's sake we can accommodate to any culture to which we travel.

14:19-23 - Paul teaches us the goal in any moral dispute or ethical challenge is mutual edification and the peace of the body. The more mature I am the more I am willing to submit to others views on an issue for their sake and the body's sake. The fruit of the Spirit – God's character growing in me by faith, i.e. love – and my relationship with Christ are the ultimate tests of what is moral and ethical in any given situation. Law cannot do this, only faith can. All Law can do is add another rule, which is exactly what the Pharisees did. All that accomplished was to add a greater and greater burden to keeping the Law and to trap people under that burden.

Faith working through love, which is the foundation of my relationship with Jesus, is the final arbiter in any moral question. Paul has taken morality out of the sphere of Law and rules and put it in the sphere of relationship and God's character. In any given moral situation when what I choose to do flows out of my faith and relationship with the Lord Jesus and I know he approves my choice, then it is right. If I am in doubt and not sure and do it anyway (ask forgiveness rather than permission) then it does not flow out of faith and I have violated my relationship with the Lord and what I do is sin. This is so much broader than Law as a moral and ethical standard because Law cannot codify every situation. That is why there is so much case law in *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy* because God needed to try and cover as many situations as possible for Israel because their relationship with him was at such an infant level. They did not yet know how to respond in faith. They needed the Law to tutor them in God's character and demands. We have passed beyond that because the Holy Spirit now communicates God's will to us in our hearts not in external rules and regulations.

A fragile balance is maintained in Paul's instructions here. We need to be sensitive to other's consciences and bend to them when we can so that they can mature and the body's unity is maintained. We do not bend when bending limits and violates our own conscience or maturity in God. A constant vigilance is necessary. We must avoid condemnation and guilt and seek to mature and help others mature. Above all we must seek to avoid quarrels and divisions in the church. Church unity is more important than my individual freedom.

Chapter 15:

15:1-4 - Paul says the strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak. The words he uses are interesting. Literally he says: *We who are able owe a debt to carry the failings of those who are not able and not please ourselves.* The word translated “ought to” is the same word Paul uses in 13:8 when he says let no debt remain outstanding or as other translations say owe no one anything. Here he says the strong or those who are able, Greek *dunatoi*, owe a debt to carry the failings of the weak, Greek *adunaton*. The word for failings can mean an error arising from a weak mind, or infirmity. Paul is saying that those who are weak in ability, or power, meaning the immature, believe things and focus on certain scruples because of weak faith or inaccurate thinking. The weak are not so much victims of false teaching as they are not thinking in a mature way. Thus the NIV translates the word as weak.

Why do we owe a debt to bear with their failings? They are our brothers and sisters. We need to bear with the weak in order to build them up. Don't just tolerate them; help them. Encourage them so that they can mature. Don't focus on yourself to please yourself. Think of others before you think of yourself. We are to please our neighbors not ourselves, just as we are to love them as ourselves.

Paul quotes *Psalms 69:9* as support that even Christ did not please himself. The verse from the *Psalms* reinforces Jesus' suffering and taking upon himself the insults of his punishers. We should do likewise in not pleasing ourselves but working to build up others. That is what love does.

Paul quotes the verse from *Psalms* and then says all of the Old Testament is instructions for us so that we might have hope in Christ. The Scriptures teach us and instruct us in how to live and especially how to have a relationship with God. This reinforces other statements he has made including in *1 Corinthians 10:11* where he says everything in the Old Testament was written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come.

15:5-6 - These verses are the first of three benedictions that Paul shares with the Romans near the end of his letter. Paul prays God would give them unity so that with one heart and voice they may glorify or praise or honor God. He has just finished the whole section on weak and strong Christians and how we are to get along with one another. This blessing deals with that issue in a positive way; be unified, be one. It reminds the Romans that their unity ultimately depends upon what God has done and is doing in them and not on their efforts. God has made them one body. They are to remain in that unity so that God is glorified through the Lord Jesus. The key is God is the one who gives endurance and unity and that unity happens as they follow the Lord Jesus. This is a dependence-diligence relationship. We are totally dependent upon God to create unity among us but for our part we need to diligently be following Jesus to maintain that unity. When we do God is glorified.

15:7-12 - Why does Paul say accept one another as he begins this paragraph? He has been talking about maintaining our unity in Christ and not judging one another about food or days of worship, things I call scruples. Accepting one another makes sense if one remembers that the Roman church was a mixed church with both Jews and Gentiles in it and had been established very early in church history by Jews returning to Rome from the Pentecost event in *Acts 2*. The Roman church would have struggled for a long time with this issue of how Jews and Gentiles could get along in a church together when they were so different about so many things. Paul's

discussion of the weak and the strong in *chapters 14-15* makes sense in that context. That is why he says accept one another. You are different but you are one in Christ!

Jesus accepted you to bring praise to God. Then Paul states that Gentiles believing in Jesus is fulfillment of the promises God made to the Patriarchs, namely the covenant of Abraham that the entire world would be blessed through him. Paul saw his ministry as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies that the nations would come to God when Messiah came. That is why he quotes from *Psalms* and *Isaiah* here. He quotes from *Psalms 18:49* that God would be praised among the Gentiles. He follows that with a quote from *Deuteronomy 32:43* inviting the Gentiles to praise God with his people. The full verse in *Deuteronomy* goes on to say rejoice over God taking vengeance over his enemies and atoning for the land and his people, which he did in Christ on the cross. The next quote he uses is from *Psalms 117:1* which invites the Gentiles to praise God. He concludes his string of proof-texts with a quote from *Isaiah 11:10* concerning the Messiah who when he rises up will draw the nations to him and give them hope.

Paul knew the prophecies as a trained rabbi. He knew Jesus was the Messiah. He knew God had commissioned him to be an apostle to the Gentiles to bring them to faith. He put all those things together and concluded that his mission and the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles and their acceptance of it was the fulfillment of prophecy. This was yet another confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah and the last days are here!

15:13 - This is the second benediction in the closing section of *Romans*. This one focuses on hope probably because he has just emphasized the prophetic fulfillment of his mission to the Gentiles.

God is a God of hope and he gives it in abundance through the Holy Spirit. The more we trust him the more he fills us with hope! The Spirit's joy and peace lead to being filled with hope. This makes sense because as we trust him his fruit grows in us which includes joy and peace. The more of his character grows in us the more our hope in him grows!

15:14-16 - Paul saw the Roman church as a more mature church, with people who were competent to instruct the believers there. It seems likely he mentions some of them in *chapter 16* in his greetings. This is in stark contrast to the Corinthians who were immature, childish and self-centered in their faith. They needed instruction, as Paul often reminded them! Paul almost sounds as if he is asking the mature Roman Christians to bear with him in writing to them about things they already know.

He identifies his ministry to the Gentiles as coming from God's grace. Paul gives a good description of how he saw his ministry. He was not a Levitical priest but he saw his ministry as priestly in that he was charged to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles so that they might hear it, believe it and become acceptable to God through it. Then they might become holy through the sanctifying work of Holy Spirit in them. Proclamation and transformation are part of the gospel. By seeing himself fulfilling a priestly duty Paul also underscores the priesthood of all believers.

15:17-22 - In *verse 15* he says he has this ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles by the grace of God. In *verses 17-18* he declares that he will not speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through him, including signs and miracles by the power of the Spirit. In other words Paul saw his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles and any success he had in that ministry as a result of God's grace to him through the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted all the glory, honor and accolades for the Gentiles coming to faith to flow to Jesus and not to him. Paul

understood that if our ministries are fueled by the grace gifts (Greek *charismata*) the Holy Spirit gives us then it is not us but the Spirit who is working through us to produce fruit for God. We are simply servants obeying our master and doing what he both called and gifted us to do. All the honor needs to go to Christ for any ministry success we have!

Paul mentions the signs and wonders he had performed through the power of the Holy Spirit. In other places in his writings and in *Acts* he states that these were the signs of his apostleship. Does that mean that apostles do signs and wonders? There are others like Stephen and Philip in *Acts* who also do signs and wonders who are not called apostles so they are not exclusive to the apostolic ministry. Paul's implication is if you did not do signs and wonders then you did not exhibit the signs of one of the Lord's apostles and so were not one of them. *Acts 2* says the apostles did signs and wonders in the early days of the church. The implication is they all did them yet it is only Peter and John who are ever specifically mentioned as the apostles who performed any kind of miraculous act. Signs and wonders are signs of the apostolic ministry but are not exclusive to the apostles. Others in the church did them through the Holy Spirit who were not apostles. Thus Paul tells the Corinthians that healing and miracles are gifts the Spirit gives to the church.

Paul describes his preaching of the gospel in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. Illyricum was the region northwest of Macedonia on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. It is modern day Albania and Montenegro. There is no record anywhere of Paul going there, except his mention of it here. It is possible he is including some of his disciples who preached there in the same way all of Asia Province was evangelized. It should be noted that in *2 Timothy 4:10* Paul notes that Titus has gone to Dalmatia, a region north of Illyricum.

He tells the Romans that he wants to preach the gospel where no one has gone before. He does not want to build on another man's foundation. Paul wanted to break new ground for the gospel. This is why he will later explain to them his desire to go to Spain and the western part of the empire in order to plant the gospel there. He quotes *Isaiah 52:15*, part of the great Servant Song, which speaks to Gentile kings and peoples hearing what has never been told them. It is no accident Paul quotes this central Servant Song because it speaks of Jesus and his mission to save the world. Paul sees his ministry as an extension of the Lord's. The Messiah has come and he is using Paul to bring the Gentiles to God through his Messiah Jesus.

Paul concludes by saying this is why he has often been hindered in coming to Rome. It is a curious statement because he does not mention any resistance to his coming to Rome in this section. I think he is saying there was work in the east to do and it was not time to come to Rome and start a ministry in the west. Otherwise his statement does not make sense in the context.

15:23-29 - Paul admits there are no more places in the east where he can evangelize where no one has already been. His work there at least is finished. He doesn't mean there are no more unreached people in the east. His focus was on planting churches in areas where there were none and then leaving the job of reaching the people in those areas to the new Christians who lived there. That was his task as an apostle, to break new ground for the gospel. He has done that in the eastern Roman Empire.

Paul's desire was to head west after his visit to Jerusalem. His plan was to preach and to evangelize in Spain and the west as he has in the east. As Antioch was his base in the east so he hopes Rome will be his base in the west. He is hoping the Roman church will support him in his endeavors. That is probably the occasion for his writing *Romans*.

First he must visit Jerusalem and take the offering for the poor to the church there. As he describes the Gentile offering for the poor in Jerusalem Paul returns to the theme of *chapters 9-11*. The Gentiles have shared in the blessings of the Jews and owe them support because of it. He concludes by stating after he has completed the delivery of the offering to Jerusalem he will go to Spain and visit them on the way.

What Paul and his Roman friends did not realize at the time is that he would be delayed almost three years in fulfilling his promise to visit Rome. In those intervening years he would be arrested and held in custody in Caesarea for two years before Roman authorities were finally able to bring him to Rome via ship. During that voyage he almost lost his life in a shipwreck off Malta. By the time he gets to Italy many of the Roman Christians greet him along the Appian Way long before he gets to the city. They had not only heard he was coming but had been impacted by his letter to them for over two years! *Romans* has had one of the greatest impacts in church history for renewal and championing the gospel of justification by faith alone. Can you imagine what it did in the Roman church in those two years?

The evidence of the *Pastoral Letters*, *Acts* and later tradition suggests that Paul was released by Nero after about two years under house arrest. He was free for several years, then re-arrested and finally martyred in around 66 by Nero. Many scholars speculate that he went to Spain in the intervening time based on his comments to the Roman church here in *chapter 15*. However, there is no evidence in history, Scripture or tradition that Paul ever planted a church in Spain. The evidence in the *Pastoral Epistles* suggests he went back east and cared for the churches he had already planted because of problems there. Did Paul ever go to Spain as he had hoped? It does not appear that he did, though there is no way to tell. One contributing factor may have been his health. The *Pastoral Letters* suggest Paul's health is starting to deteriorate. It is quite possible that the rigors of his itinerant life were finally catching up to him. Luke had been with him for years both as a friend and also as his physician caring for Paul.

15:30-33 - Paul asked for prayers for protection against the unbelievers in Judea. Given his comments earlier about his people and his love for them, as well as their stubborn refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah it must have grieved Paul deeply to say this. The unbelievers he speaks of here are Jews, especially the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin. His prayer request turned out to be prophetic. He also asked them to pray that the church in Jerusalem would accept the generous offering from the Gentile churches. Paul must have had some concern that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem would not accept the offering from the Gentiles because of the age old prejudice against Gentiles. Fortunately that concern turned out to be unfounded. Their prayers for his coming to Rome would also be answered though not in the way Paul anticipated. It would be more than two years before Paul would come to Rome. The Jews would oppose him and even make a pact to kill him. Paul would spend two years in prison and come to Rome under arrest having appealed to Caesar. Yet God would use those two years because it was during that time that Luke being with Paul must have gathered much of the material for his gospel. It was probably during the time of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea that Luke talked with many of the eyewitnesses and ministers (Greek *huperatas*) of the Word (see *Luke 1:1-4*) that knew firsthand the stories and teachings of Jesus. God had a plan!

He ends the main body of his letter with a short benediction. May the God of peace be with you all. Paul would need God's peace in order to bear up under what was coming to him. Luke reports in *Acts* that as he journeys to Jerusalem at every city there were prophecies of danger, hardship and arrest ahead. God was preparing Paul for what was coming. Yet not even

the great apostle could have foreseen how God would bring Paul to Rome, especially after so long a time in prison in Caesarea. Ultimately Paul would get his heart's desire. He would come to the great city! Think of all he taught them in those two years under house arrest and how he was able to flesh out and clarify what he had written to them in his letter almost three years before.

Chapter 16:

16:1-2 - Paul knew lots of people in the Roman church as evidenced by *chapter 16*. Perhaps he was sending greetings to all these people in order to validate his plan to use Rome as a base of operations in the west. Since he knew so many people and he had written them his theology of the gospel it would be natural for them to help him.

Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. The word in Greek is *diakonon* (feminine accusative case). *Diakonia* is the normal word for servant and does not occur in the feminine form. This has led many to believe that Phoebe was a deaconess, a female deacon, who had helped Paul and many others. It is possible that Phoebe is the one who delivered Paul's letter to the Romans since the major port city of Cenchrea was her home. Cenchrea was on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Corinth. It would have been easy for Phoebe to take ship to Rome from Corinth or Cenchrea.

16:3-5 - Priscilla and Aquila must have returned to Rome when Paul wrote this from Corinth in the winter of 58. They had been in Ephesus with him but it must have been safe enough to return to Rome, their original home. The incident about risking their lives for Paul probably occurred in Ephesus. They once again started a house church in Rome, perhaps with some of the same people as before although we do not know. Every city in which they are mentioned as living they start a house church. They had served as fellow workers with Paul in Corinth and like advance workers in Ephesus. Perhaps that was their mission in Rome, to get the church there ready for Paul's coming and mission in the west. They would have also been able to speak in favor of Paul's teaching and preaching of the gospel to the Roman church and vouch for his apostolic authority.

Epenetus had gone to live in Rome but found the Lord in Asia, perhaps at Ephesus. Some have taken details like this plus the mention of Priscilla and Aquila and said *Romans 16* was not in the original letter and does in fact belong to Ephesians or to some letter of Paul's that greets the people in Ephesus and Asia and not Rome. That conclusion is based on very slim evidence and there is nothing in the letter that supports this fact.

16:6-7 - Paul wants the church to greet Mary because of the hard work she has done for them. Paul must have met Mary somewhere on his journeys. Her hard work had probably been done in Corinth or Ephesus or one of the other cities where Paul had ministered.

He asks that they greet Andronicus and Junias (NIV), Greek Junia, a feminine name. These were either brother and sister or husband and wife, probably more likely the latter. This is the only time the name Junia appears in the New Testament but it does appear in extra biblical literature. Whenever it does it is always feminine. Junia is almost certainly a woman's name.

Relatives may refer to fellow Jews or it may be Andronicus and Junia were blood relatives of Paul. Paul says they are outstanding among the apostles. Does that mean both of them were seen and called apostles? They would have been of the second tier of apostles like Barnabas, the missionary church planters. Or does it mean that they were seen as outstanding people in the circle of the apostles? The Greek preposition is *en* with the dative case and could

literally be translated: in the apostles, with the apostles or among the apostles. Paul says they were Christians before he was and had been in prison with him. Where, Ephesus, Philippi or somewhere else we do not know? This is before Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his imprisonment in Rome.

Some have speculated that Andronicus and Junia were in Jerusalem at Pentecost and were some of the first Jewish Christians to take the gospel back to Rome and found the church there. That is possible but there is not enough evidence to be certain.

16:8-12 - Paul greets many people he knew in Rome in these verses. He lists ten by name and includes many more because he speaks of households. Of the ten he names at least four are women. Three of them he singles out as working hard in the Lord. It is difficult to know what Paul means by that phrase. It could be they worked hard in hospitality and support kind of ministries which would have been common in that culture. But it could also mean they worked hard in evangelistic or teaching work as had Priscilla. We do not know. Where Paul had met these people we also do not know, but Rome was the destination for many people in the ancient world and it is possible that Paul had known many in the Roman church who had at one time lived in other parts of the empire. We assume he met them during his missionary journeys but it is also possible that he knew them when he was in Tarsus. There is really no way to tell.

He lists Herodian as his relative. The word can mean kinsman as in related by blood but it can also mean kinsman by race. Herodian could be a fellow Jew or he could be an actual relative of Paul like a cousin or uncle. It is impossible to say with certainty. He uses the same word to describe Andronicus and Junia in *verse 7*. In the context it seems fellow Jews is the best translation but it is by no means certain. It is possible that these are people who are of the tribe of Benjamin and that Paul is calling them relatives to distinguish them from other Jews in general.

He names Urbanus in *verse 9* as a fellow worker. Paul reserves that title for only a select few in his writings. They are people like Mark, Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila, Titus, Timothy and people that were close to Paul and helped him or were partners with him in his evangelistic work.

All the names listed in *verses 8-12* are only listed here in all of Paul's letters. Nothing more is known of them.

16:13-16 - Paul singles out Rufus. See *Mark 15:21*. Mark mentions that Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus. If Mark was familiar with the church in Rome, then the Rufus Paul mentions here could be the same Rufus Mark mentions in his gospel, the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross. If so he had made his way to Rome, along with his mother. At some point Paul had met them or at least her and she had cared for him. Mark also would be in Rome during the time of Paul's imprisonment there and easily could have met Rufus.

The rest of the list of people in *verses 14-15* are probably people in various house churches that Paul knew in Rome. *Verse 14* ends with, "*and the brothers with them.*" *Verse 15* ends with, "*and all the saints with them.*" The people Paul lists were probably leaders in these house churches. One more woman, Julia is mentioned by name in these verses as well as the sister of Nereus who is not mentioned by name.

Paul asks them to greet one another with a holy kiss, a frequent greeting in his letters of affection and fellowship. Paul then closes this list of greetings with a general, "*all the churches of Christ send greetings.*" It is Paul's way of not only greeting the Roman church but also reinforcing his primary reason for writing Romans. Paul has been personally responsible for

planting many churches in the eastern part of the empire, now he wants to do the same thing in the west.

16:17-20 - Paul warns his Roman friends to be on the lookout for those among them who would cause divisions and put stumbling blocks in the way of the church. The word for stumbling block is the same word he used in *14:13* as he cautioned them not to put a stumbling block in front of a brother or sister. The Greek word is *skandala* and literally means the stick that trips a trap. Paul says if anyone comes and tries to lead you away from the teaching you have learned shun them. Keep away from them. The Greek word for teaching he uses here, *didachan*, is the same word he used in *6:17* and as used there probably means the gospel and the accompanying instructions about how to follow the Lord Jesus as his disciples.

Paul warns the Romans that these people do not serve the Lord Christ but their own appetites and agendas. They deceive people by smooth talk and flattery. They take advantage of people who do not fear evil and are too trusting. On one level not fearing evil and trusting people is a good thing. Paul is warning the Romans that to think that way about people who are influenced by the enemy to destroy the church is a very dangerous thing. He wants them to love one another but also be on the lookout for false teachers who will lead the church astray.

Paul commends the Romans for their obedience and tells them he is full of joy over their witness across the empire. He exhorts them to be wise about what is good and innocent about evil, meaning innocent in experience not naively believing everyone. Then he reminds them that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under their feet. This is probably a reference to Jesus' Second Coming when he will be totally victorious over Satan. This is one of the few times in *Romans* where Paul brings up the subject of Satan and spiritual warfare. He has dealt extensively with human sin and its consequences but not very much with Satan. He deals with it here almost as an afterthought or final warning. Paul's later letters show an increasing concern by the apostle over false teachers. As the churches matured and the gospel spread the danger of false teachers grew up through the end of the New Testament era. John in his seven letters in *Revelation* is very concerned with false teachers that lead the church astray doctrinally and as a result into sin. Paul closes the section with the now familiar blessing, may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

16:21-23 - Paul sends greetings from several people who are with him as he writes this letter in Corinth. Timothy is his trusted lieutenant and fellow worker. There is a Lucius of Cyrene listed as one of the teachers in the church at Antioch in *Acts 13:1*. Whether this is the same Lucius here with Paul in Corinth is impossible to know. Jason is mentioned in *Acts 17* as the host of a house church in Thessalonica. Luke lists several men who were accompanying Paul with the offering for the Jerusalem poor in *Acts 20* but Jason is not on that list. Sopater is listed among them and here Paul sends greetings from Sosipater. Is this simply a variant spelling of the man's name or is this a totally different man? Again, we do not know. The Sopater Luke lists as accompanying Paul in *Acts 20* was from Berea. All three men, Lucius, Jason and Sosipater Paul identifies as his relatives. He has used the title earlier in *Romans 16* to describe either actual family members, fellow Benjaminites or fellow Jews. I lean toward fellow members of the tribe of Benjamin. It seems the most likely meaning. Tertius, Paul's secretary in writing the letter, adds a personal greeting at the end. We know nothing more about him. It is possible he was someone from the Corinthian church.

Paul sends greetings from one Gaius, where he and his company were staying in Corinth. There is a Gaius, a traveling companion of Paul's from Macedonia mentioned in *Acts 19:29*

concerning the riot in Ephesus. There is another Gaius (a different one?) mentioned in *Acts 20:4* who was listed as from Derbe and was to accompany Paul and others with the offering for the Jerusalem poor. If Paul wrote from Corinth then Gaius had accompanied Paul on his way through Macedonia after he left Ephesus and had made accommodations in Corinth or had a home there. There is the possibility that this is a third Gaius as this was probably a common name.

Erastus was Corinth's director of public works, an important city official in Corinth who had become a believer. Quartus is an otherwise unknown person save for his greeting here.

16:25-27 - The Greek text has parentheses around this final benediction in *Romans*. However neither the NIV, NASB nor the NLT have any textual note indicating this was not in the original text of *Romans*.

Paul gives praise to the God who is able to establish them and make them strong through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that gospel is according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past a phrase or idea Paul will several years later flesh out in his letter to the *Ephesians*, while he is under house arrest in Rome. That mystery is now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by God's eternal command. The gospel was hidden to the Jews of the Old Testament yet written down beforehand in the prophets. Paul could also mean that the preaching of the gospel by the apostles and the writing of their letters such as his should also be included in the prophetic writings of God's gospel and revelation. If that is his meaning then Paul makes a case for the gospels and letters of the New Testament to be included with the prophetic writings of the Scriptures.

At the very end Paul reprises the idea of the obedience of faith. The gospel is given by God so that all nations might believe in God and obey him; walk in his Spirit and obey him out of love from the heart. Thus the great letter ends as it began.

The final words of *Romans* are, “*to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!*” This is a fitting closing for the greatest letter Paul wrote. In the end it is all about Jesus Christ and what God has accomplished through him!