

## Commentary on the Book of Romans

### Romans 1

**1Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

Paul refers to himself very humbly as a bond-servant of God, having chosen to submit himself willingly to the purposes of God. He was called by God as an apostle when Christ visited him on the road to Damascus. Paul did indeed make the choice to respond in faith and take up the call to apostleship, but ultimately it was God who bought His soul from hell, having directly intervened in Paul's life when he was still Saul. Paul was qualified to be an apostle because he saw the risen Christ in the vision on the Damascus road. He shares of how God set him apart as a chosen vessel to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). This was the purpose of His life and calling, and he did it with great perseverance and steadfast labor, despite vast difficulties and persecution.

**2which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,**

God promised in the Old Testament Scriptures to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. The gospel in its fullness was still a mystery that even the prophets who foretold of it didn't fully understand, though they desperately wanted to (1 Peter 1:10-11). Yet now in Paul's time, the mystery of the fullness of the gospel which fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies has been made manifest.

**3concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,**

Many prophecies foretold of the Son of God who would come in the likeness of man, being born in the Davidic line. God's promise to David was that he would always have an heir on the throne. This has been made possible through Christ who has been given all power and all authority. Seeing that a lot of Paul's purpose in this letter to the Romans is to show that man is justified apart from the law through grace and by faith whether Jew or Gentile, it makes sense that he would begin by showing how the Old Testament points to the revelation and coming of Christ.

**4who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,**

Christ proved Himself God and victor over sin and death in His resurrection from the dead. We see that the Holy Spirit was involved in the resurrection process. Only one who had lived a perfectly holy life without having been born in any corrupting influence of sin could be the One who could rise from the dead and not have the penalty of the curse to pay. The One who has been raised from the dead is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The picture given repeatedly throughout the New Testament is that Jesus is received through simple faith and according to repentance from sin. This is why He is called both Savior and Lord.

**5through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,**

Paul emphasizes that his ministry is by grace and because of grace. He would have finished the duration of his life murdering Christians if God had not graciously intervened in his life to transform his heart and mind. His call to be an apostle is one of the best illustrations of grace, considering that he had no merits deserving of apostleship whatsoever. He was the hypocrite of hypocrites and the villain of villains. Yet God chose to use Him, calling Him to testify about the gospel to the Gentiles for the sake of the name of Christ who said that he came to save the sick, no matter whether they were Jew or Gentile. All that God does in His grace for us is ultimately for His own glory. It is always for the honor of the Name.

**6among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;**

The church at Rome obviously had both Jews and Gentiles. It was a portrait of the message of Paul, that Jesus Christ invites all men to Himself, no matter what race, nation, or status.

**7to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

He identifies his audience, the church at Rome, those beloved of God who are called as saints. The definition of the church is a group of saints. Saints are not some special group of believers to whom we must pay homage and to whom we must pray. All believers are saints because a saint simply means “a holy one.” We are holy and justified in Christ. We have no merit apart from His work on our behalf. Thus, we are no longer sinners but saints in God’s eyes. Judicially and legally before God, our record is clean. We have the perfection of Christ positionally, though we don’t always manifest it conditionally and practically. Like Paul, we can be ministers of grace and peace to one another because we all have the same Lord and Father. Our peace and grace is found only in Him.

**8First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.**

Paul thanks his God (notice the personal emphasis of his relationship with God) through Christ (for it is only the blood of Christ which allows any believer to approach God in prayer), giving thanks for all who have come to Christ. He is thankful particularly because of the faithful testimony of these believers. To some churches he has to write harsh rebukes. To Rome, he begins to instruct the believers in the meat of the Word, bypassing the milk. These believers are faithful and mature, needing to grow in their knowledge of God. The testimony of the church at Rome is so excellent that their faith is being proclaimed throughout the entire known world. There are a few churches in every generation, it seems, which have an impact nationally and even internationally. They are

faithful to the Scriptures, studying them through and through, and being faithful to follow God by faith to take the gospel message to the world. If only there could be more such churches.

**9For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,**

Paul has a reborn spirit now that he is a believer. Having persecuted the church and Christ (as Jesus asked Him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”), now he is serving the church and Christ by preaching the gospel. Paul thinks about and prays for the believers always. He sets an example of praying unceasingly, even acknowledging the burden of thinking about the needs of the churches every day.

**10always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.**

Paul’s hope is that by God’s grace he will be able to at last succeed in going to Rome, which he does. But it is all dependent upon the will of God. Sometimes the Holy Spirit would open a door, and other times the door would be closed. He was waiting to see how God would move in his heart and what opportunities God would provide. Paul didn’t presume upon the will of God, making God do his will. He rather waited for God to lead Him so that he could be sure that his work would be successful spiritually.

**11For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;**

Paul’s burden is to encourage the church by imparting some spiritual gift to them, whether faith, teaching, exhortation, knowledge, wisdom, or some other gift. The end goal would be that he would leave the church strengthened, edified, and established in their faith even beyond where they are now. The farther someone is entrenched in truth, the harder it is to trick them and pull them to fall away.

**12that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.**

The neat thing about when we impart encouragement to our brothers and sisters is that we ourselves are also encouraged. We need the fellowship of one another’s faith to encourage us. When we see God at work and when we see change and growth in others that we know is humanly impossible, we praise God and are pushed and moved to follow God more intently ourselves. Satan wants us isolated so that we begin to doubt the reality of God and spiritual things, even questioning the necessity of our contribution to the body. Yet our faithfulness and seeing one another’s faithfulness spurs the church as a whole on to further love and good deeds.

**13I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.**

Paul has wanted and has even planned to come to visit the church at Rome on several different occasions. Yet he has had to alter his plans because he has been prevented from doing so. It has not been God's will. This teaches us the value and at the same time the limitation of godly planning. We order our lives so that we can minister to others and encourage them, but we can only do particular things as God allows and in the timing which God ordains. Thus, everything is if God wills, and not necessarily because we have planned it. Much of the effective ministry in Paul's life was unplanned, like the jailer asking to receive Christ and meeting Lydia, the first convert at Ephesus. The reality of the Christian life is that we must be constantly listening to what God is saying and watching to see how He wants us to participate in His work. Paul's goal is also to be imitated. He desires to have fruit to be credited to his account in Rome as he has had elsewhere among the Gentiles. Ultimately, of course he wants to present his life as a faithful and holy offering to God in Christ. Yet it is not selfish to want to have spiritual fruit; it is godly.

**14I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.**

Paul has been commissioned by God to preach the gospel indiscriminately, as we have as well. Of course the gospel was for Jews, but Paul's particular calling was to get it to the Gentiles. The Roman empire had absorbed the Persian empire which had itself been absorbed by the Greek empire. Even Rome itself had strong Greek Hellenistic influences in its culture. Thus, Paul refers to getting the gospel to the particular Gentiles in Rome, the Greeks and the barbarians, who are those who do not speak the Greek language and who were generally known as being more rude and harsh. Yet even to such was Paul commissioned to preach the gospel. If the gospel had power in such an environment, certainly it has power in any environment.

**15So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**

Paul sums up the attitude of his own heart by sharing that he is eager to preach the gospel to those who are at Rome. His time spent encouraging the church there will also be used evangelistically. Likely, the Christians will invite unsaved friends and family to hear Paul speak. Likely, Paul will go out into the marketplaces and synagogues to preach the gospel. Paul always thought evangelistically.

**16For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

Paul didn't try to wax eloquent, but he did preach and proclaim the gospel as revealed in the Word of God. This he did with boldness and no shame whatsoever. Those who dance around the issue are ashamed of Christ and His message. The message needs to be

declared with utter forthrightness and completeness. It can't be altered, manipulated, or messed with in any way. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. No one can believe apart from hearing the gospel (Romans 10:16). There is inherent power in the Word of God. God has made us to understand reason, logic, and propositional truth. He has contained the message leading to eternal life by faith in words. Jesus Christ Himself was referred to by John as the "logos," or the "word." We cannot shrink away from the word of truth and message of truth, which is the gospel. The gospel has power in all places and in all times no matter who the listening audience is. Some things never change. God never changes and His Word never changes. Anyone who alters and tinkers with the gospel ought to be accursed (Galatians 1:8), says Paul. And God will curse anyone who adds or takes away from the words of His book. God is serious about His Word because the power is in the Word.

**17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."**

Just how powerful are the Word of God and the gospel message? The gospel message reveals the righteousness of God from faith to faith, or from faith for faith. In other words, the gospel must be believed upon and received by faith, and its result will be a person who lives by faith. The righteous man is the one who has been justified as Abraham was when he believed God. God takes our faith in the gospel message and credits righteousness to our account. We receive truth in faith, and we live according to truth by faith. We never stop living according to faith. We must keep walking by faith, believing the promises of God and understanding and remembering that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith pleases God in salvation and in sanctification for both happen through faith.

**18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**

Now the reality is that some receive and believe in faith while others do not. All men are guilty based upon responding to the revelation that they are given. All men know at least some truth about God, whether they have the Mosaic Law or our Bible of today. The reason that they are guilty is because God has given them truth through the created order and in their conscience. Thus, those who suppress the truth (note that there are no true atheists because God says that they suppress the truth, implying that they have adequate evidence of God's existence; the agnostic is also indicted because he is accusing God of being a liar, saying that there isn't enough truth when God says that there is adequate revelation) are deserving of the wrath of God. God is totally just and fair to punish liars and rebels. Hell is just because it is chosen by men who refuse the knowledge and grace of God by faith.

**19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

The truth of God is evident within each and every person. They know that God exists. God has set eternity in the hearts of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11). They know inherently that there is life after death and that this cannot possibly be all that there is. They have a sense of morality, whether they listen to it or not. They have expectations for others morally whether or not they live up to them themselves. They have a mind that thinks and reasons and is self-aware. It dreams, it hopes, it longs, and it aspires. The spirit groans, aches, and awaits its eternal state. There is something within every person that they know cannot be mere atoms interacting with other atoms. There is a spiritual dimension behind the physical. This is why most of the world acknowledges a god or gods of some kind. This is why we make idols of something because we are made to worship something outside of ourselves. The idol may be ourselves or our jobs but we all worship something. Within the conscience of man, there is clear evidence of God, sufficient enough to damn a soul.

**20For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

Before creation, there was no man and no matter. Thus, no one was guilty. But since the foundation of the world and the creation of man, all are held responsible to the revelation that is given in creation which gives clear testimony to not just the existence of God, but of what He is like. His power, that He exists outside of time, that He is supernatural and divine, that He is over all things, and that He is a God of love and care can all be seen in the creation. The vastness of the universe, the way that all things somehow coexist, the balance of the planets and the forces of nature, the smallness of created objects even tinier than an atom, and the diversity and beauty of creation all point to a Creator. Man knows that there is a God because God has given Him sufficient evidence to believe. Yet man rejects God and any accountability to a God.

**21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.**

All men know God, and thus they fear death or call out to Him when they are in great distress. Our nation blasphemes God day in and day out in many ways but then calls upon God when we are attacked or under duress. Sometimes that is the only time people call out to God, and even some of those calls are curses. Yet there is an acknowledgement that there is a God behind all things. Even God's justice and judgment are evidences of His existence. Denying the revelation of God in conscience and in creation, man turns his own way and does not honor God or give Him thanks. Turning from God who is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, man comes up with wild fantasies like evolution, naturalism, and hedonism. His endless speculations are destined to be wrong and in vain. Yet the culture considers them wise and understanding when the reality is that their wisdom is taken from them. Their hearts are darkened in foolishness, not seeing any light, for it is only in the Light of God that we see light (Psalm 36:9).

## **22Professing to be wise, they became fools,**

The ironic thing is that the world thinks Christians are stupid and foolish for believing in God and in the gospel. They profess to be wise and feign understanding, having some advanced degree to prove it (which merely was given by others of like fallen minds and darkened hearts). Others rest their authority based upon popularity and the approval of men, both of which are temporal and changeable. Wisdom is found only in the absolute truth of God's Word and in the immutability of God's character and divine nature, which He has clearly seen fit to give to the world. Yet rejecting absolute truth, the world wanders in relativistic foolishness, "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). This is because they do not practice the truth but rather indulge their fleshly lusts. It is those who practice the truth that come to the light (John 3:21).

## **23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.**

All men have to worship something. All men have their gods in the form of an idol of some kind. Man cannot become a "nonworshipper" but they can only exchange what they give glory to. Unsaved man denies God, exchanges the glory of the incorruptible God, and replaces God with some image of something within the creation. Man has worshipped images of animals and humans throughout history. We still do, but the more modern countries just do it in different ways. The ironic thing about man worshipping the creation is that it is the very thing that points to the Creator. It is like Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel and all who come to see it denying that anybody painted it. Rather, all of the visitors merely give glory to the painting itself rather than crediting the painter of it. The painting can do nothing of itself, but yet man chooses to worship that which has been created rather than the one behind it all. Man chooses to worship things that rust, rot, and degrade rather than the unchangeable and incorruptible God of the universe.

## **24Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.**

Even though full judgment is yet to be meted out at the Great White Throne and through the lake of fire, God is not absent and fully delaying the effects of sin. The effects of sin are already having their effect. Furthermore, the unsaved are storing up more and more wrath as God removes any gracious barriers to sin as they deny the truth that He has put right in front of their faces. God gave them over to the lusts of their hearts to impurity so that they would defile and dishonor their bodies. This has happened throughout history to those nations and individuals who reject God. They get carried away into immorality of all kinds, and they are consumed and destroyed by it. They become spiritually stupider and stupider and more dishonored and filthy morally.

## **25For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

Postmodern man tries to deny truth, saying that it doesn't exist at least in an absolute form. Yet God says that they exchanged the truth for a lie. In other words, even though they deny truth, they are substituting an alternative "truth" by exchanging the Truth with some manmade lie propagated ultimately by the father of lies himself. They deny truth and invent their own truth which is an untruth and a lie. They worship the creatures and the creation rather than the Creator. Paul can't even continue without giving glory to the Creator on the spot. He is blessed forever, no matter what His foolish creatures say about Him and do in spite of Him. He will have the final say, for God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7).

**26For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,**

Because mankind chose to worship the creation rather than the Creator, God gave them over to degrading passions. Basically, they hardened their heart against God, and since God's respects our free will and ability to make choices, He let them indulge their desires. However, they will be judged for them. Thinking they have some new and innovative way of experiencing sexual pleasure and fulfillment, the women exchanged the truth which they had in loving a man and chose rather to desire an unnatural function with other women. The body parts don't match, the true desires of the heart go unfelt, and the experiences defile the emotions and the morals, even the physical body with disease. Only a fool would believe that two women go together and two men go together. The conscience and created order of nature all tell us otherwise. Yet, having rejected the first source of wisdom and revelation, God gives people over to think something is right, normal, and healthy when it in fact destroys them, stealing from them the very joy that they want deep down.

**27and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.**

Like Sodom and Gomorrah and other pagan cultures before us, the men likewise abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desires toward one another. The fact that they abandoned the natural function again indicates that they knew the right way but chose otherwise. They let go of truth and a nagging conscience, and were given over to a corrupt mind which would allow them to burn in passion and desire for something that otherwise wouldn't naturally happen. Anybody can tell that it takes a male and female to reproduce and continue the existence of a species and the economic welfare of a nation, just to mention a couple of reasons for God's created order. Men commit indecent acts, glorying in their shame and in that which is unseemly, and they receive in their own persons the due penalty of their error. The propagation of disease, bodily injury, and emotional distress are all related to disobedience to God's created order and design.

God's ways are best, and when we go against them we do ourselves damage in this life and certainly in the next. When we sin sexually we do it against our own body in



addition to the others. All other sins are outside the body, but the sexual sins are inside (2 Corinthians 6:18). This means that it does damage so deep that it, in essence, slowly kills the soul and conscience.

**28And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,**

They suppressed the truth about God, they did not give God the glory and thanks due Him, and they didn't even acknowledge God any longer. This is the bottom of the long slide into moral decay. They don't even acknowledge God, they don't feel any remorse in their conscience, and they love and glory in their dishonor and dysfunction. Their mind is so defiled that it is as if they live in an alternate universe and world. That is not to say that they do not function well in the world from a practical and social standpoint because they do. It is to say that they miss the true reality and the true kingdom. Indeed, they have no capacity any longer to even discern it because their mind is depraved. They love the improper things, sexual and nonsexual. All that is contrary to the nature and desire of God they do.

**29being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,**

The unbeliever is not a good person with some sin here and there. They are defiled through and through, though they may selfishly do "loving" things. Some people have their flesh under control and well managed in that they are able to have a "successful" life and make a lot of money. Yet on the inside they are filled with all unrighteousness and wickedness. Sin, especially sexual sin, is often a package deal. Immorality, for example, is often accompanied by bitterness, discontentment, controlling, fear, anxiety, addiction, deceit, envy, and a whole other list of sins. When one sin comes in and is fully indulged, a lot of others accompany it. The unsaved are enslaved and mired in sin. The list of sin is rather self-explanatory. The important thing to note is that it is intending to be comprehensive, regardless of whether or not all of the particular sins imaginable are specifically listed. All wickedness, unrighteousness, and evil of any kind fill the one who has totally failed to acknowledge God. They seek selfish gain, not being satisfied with what they have but envying what others have. They are always chasing after the next person, trying to measure up with and even outdo their neighbor. Life is always a competition. There is disorder, a lack of peace, a lack of love, evil intent, hate, murder, cunning, evil speaking, evil intent, and evil actions.

**30slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**

Having gossiped, they also slander. They talk behind people's back and try to give others a bad name, all the while trying to advance themselves and their own cause. They not only fail to acknowledge God, but they outright hate Him. They are defiant toward Him, totally stubborn in their ways and sinful desires. They brag about themselves, devise new ways of evil in case one is not already listed, scheme while lying in bed, and disobey

their parents, having no respect for authority. Christians must of all people pay specific attention to disobedient children because God takes it very seriously. We can't view it as a lesser sin.

**31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;**

Unbelievers do a good job at saying the nice things, but typically there is nothing that they would go out of their way to do for a hurting person, especially if it was somebody that they were "competing" against. They are unloving and unmerciful, seeking their own interest at the expense of others. They lack understanding because they have rejected the wisdom of God. They are untrustworthy because they are only concerned about their own well-being. They play off others, using them to gain a personal advantage. Another person's worth is based only upon what they can do for them.

**32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.**

This is perhaps the most frightening and mind-boggling part of the whole reality of the heart of man. Paul says by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that although mankind knows the laws and expectations of God, they do not do them. Whether a person has the Mosaic Law or not, there is some inner mechanism that enables all men to know the difference between right and wrong. Since they know that there is a God and that God is perfectly just, they also know that those who break the law of God are worthy of death. They know in their heart of hearts that they deserve hell. It is the false teachers who try to undo hell by rewriting the Scriptures. Most of the people on the street who don't know God think it reasonable that they would go to hell. They might assert that God wouldn't send them there or that they are basically good people, but they generally will agree that it is reasonable for God to send a lawbreaker to hell. And whether they admit it or not they know that they are lawbreakers deserving of hell. Despite their understanding of their eternal fiery destiny, they continue to break God's law, not caring about the realities that they know. They are too absorbed in their sinful pursuits to make the change that they know deep down is reasonable. Not only do they continue in their sinful pursuits, but they eagerly and gleefully approve and encourage others who break the law of God. Sinners find other sinners who will make them feel better about themselves. There is something comforting in journeying to hell together, though it won't be comfortable upon arrival. God's wrath is revealed and justly so. Man has plenty of indications to respond in faith, but they choose to reject God.

**Romans 2**

**1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.**

Paul has showed that all men have allowed themselves to live out their fleshly desires, and thus the conclusion is that no one can stand in a position of judgment over another. The reason for this is that in which they would condemn somebody else, that very same thing they themselves are condemned by. Very simply put, those who condemn others do the same things themselves. There is none righteous, no not one.

**2And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.**

It is just and righteous for judgment from God to be put upon those who practice injustice and evil. As Romans 1:31-32 had explained, even those who are given over into the darkest of sins know that they deserve God's punishment. God's wrath is perfectly deserved and just, for He has revealed Himself but man has denied the truth.

**3But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?**

Paul reminds those who are self-righteous, condemning others and passing judgment upon them yet all the while doing the same things themselves, that they will not escape the judgment of God. It is easy to make a relative comparison of one's righteousness by judging oneself in light of a worse sinner, but God sees all. No amount of self-justification and rationalization over sin will get a person who hides sin in their heart exempt from having to face the judgment of God.

**4Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**

But it is likely not so much an issue of ignorance over the real state of one's own heart. Paul asks if maybe the issue is that those in Rome think lightly of the vastness and wealth of the kindness, tolerance, and patience of God. Why would a person continue in sin and not repent? Either they think they are alright as they are or perhaps they do not recognize how kind God is and what He has done in Christ so that they can repent. It is ultimately always a recognition of the grace, mercy, and kindness of God that leads any person to repent. We know that the unsaved know innately in their inner person of the reality of hell. Yet such an eternal destiny does nothing to motivate them to repent. God's wrath is not what leads somebody to repent. It may cause them to want to see the solution to their problem, namely Christ. In that respect we must share the reality of the wrath of God, especially since the work of Christ on the cross doesn't serve a purpose without having to satisfy God's wrath. During the great tribulation, men will continue to shake their fists at God despite facing His intense and ongoing wrath. If only they could realize how merciful and patient God is, not wanting anyone to perish. As believers, when we realize just how much better it is living life filled with the Spirit and enjoying intimate fellowship with God and when we realize how sin is destructive and the real thief of joy, then we will do far better in truly repenting and living perseveringly in a way honoring to Christ.

**5But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,**

God has been kind in granting to all life and breath. He has made a beautiful, albeit fallen, world for us to enjoy. He has sent His own Son to die in our place so that we could be forgiven and reign with Christ in paradise forever. How much kinder can God be? Yet man has rejected the reality of God and has declared God to be either non-existent or utterly irrelevant and certainly not deserving of their honor, gratitude, attention, or respect. They have not responded to the kindness of God which has been revealed. Their stubbornness and unrepentant heart will keep them destined to face the wrath of God. Some continue to live in sin so that their sin abounds and increases the wrath that they will face. God does not let sin go unpunished, though it may appear that way to us from our earthly perspective. The wicked may think that they are getting away with their evil and thus will use that to justify continuing to live in evil. They will think that God has let them get away with their evil deeds. But God has not. He has a record of how every man has lived, and He will bring His judgment to bear in the day of His return.

**6who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:**

According to John 4:26, the work of man is that they believe in the One whom God has sent. They must respond to the revelation of Christ and to the kindness of God in sending His Son as a Redeemer. Yet they do not and in blaspheming the Holy Spirit who draws them by rejecting God, they render up for themselves the wrath of God. Their deeds are evidence of their unredeemed nature, and they will be judged for all that they have done against God. The believer is judged upon His faith in Christ and in how He has served God in light of that faith. Faith alone grants the believer eternity. The deeds that are done in light of saving faith are for storing up eternal rewards and honor.

**7to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;**

**8but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.**

Those who respond in faith and then persevere in doing good (all believers will have fruit) will be granted that which they seek, eternal life, honor, and immortality with God in Christ forever. This does not teach in anyway that doing good earns salvation. It is talking about those who are working out their salvation which is already granted them but has yet to be fully revealed until the day of Christ. We are saved by grace through faith and appointed unto God works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10). The good works are evidence of a believer's saving faith. Those who reject Christ and live as their nature compels them by continuing to serve the flesh and doing all kinds of evil will be judged and must face God's wrath. Their ambitions are always self-centered. This is what separates the believer from the unbeliever. The believer is able to love others as truly more important than himself. The unbeliever is unable to think of the welfare of others above his own. There is a great

difference between love and charity. Love is free while charity is self-inflating. Again, we see that the unsaved are indicted because they rejected the truth and revelation given them. Their punishment in hell is perfectly just. God has been patient, giving them their entire life to respond and calling to them through a variety of channels, most importantly through His Word. Yet they have rather obeyed unrighteousness, wrath, and indignation. They actually follow the beck and call of evil and of the devil. Ultimately, that means they are obeying their own sentencing, sprinting as it were to their own eternal execution.

**9There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,**

No one will be exempt from the eternal punishment of hell who does evil. No matter who they are, what their earthly status is, how good they are relative to somebody else, or where they come from, they will be judged.

**10but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

But those who by faith in Christ serve Him faithfully will receive glory and honor and peace. The unsaved get eternal pain, torment, dishonor, shame, and never have even a moment of peace. The horror is unimaginable. Just as hell is indiscriminating, so is heaven. Anyone can choose to receive Christ by faith and thus receive eternal life. Race, age, and other manmade dividing factors are not an issue with God.

**11For there is no partiality with God.**

God is not partial to any man. His only issue is whether or not a person has been declared righteous on the basis of faith in Christ.

**12For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;**

It doesn't matter if a person was a Jew or a Gentile. God is impartial when it comes to giving mercy or pouring out wrath. The Jews had the Mosaic Law (capital "L") which doesn't justify any man for no man can keep the totality of the Law. In fact, no one even gets close. Who truly loves God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength? Naturally it is impossible. It requires faith in a God who is merciful and forgiving. It requires repentance and an obedience to whatever revelation God has given the hearer at the time. The Jews, having had the revelation of the Law, are judged by the Law. Those who did not have the Law are judged apart from the Law, but according to the revelation given them either by other means or by the creation and their own conscience. The Law is not the issue when it comes to salvation. The issue is simply whether a person has repented and believed what God has said. It is on the basis of obedience to the revelation given a person that God will judge them. Having now spoken through Christ and His Word, those who have a knowledge of both (which is most of mankind), will be judged

on that basis. Those who do not yet have the gospel preached to them will be judged upon the revelation that they have. They are not free from God's judgment.

**13for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.**

The Jews are the ones who heard the Law. Gentiles had no idea about the Law for the most part. Yet just because the Jews had the Law and heard it on a Sabbath day did not mean that they were justified. It is those who keep the Law in its fullness who are justified, which alone was Christ. We are justified when we are grafted in to His righteousness by being crucified with Him, buried with Him, and raised to new life through Him. He is our only hope. Before His coming, God granted righteousness based upon faith in what was known, which varied depending upon the time, place, and individual.

**14For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,**

The Gentiles did not have the Mosaic Law, yet some did instinctively by the working of God's grace in their hearts the will of God anyway. Mankind has a moral conscience. If somebody repents of their sin and by faith in God does what they know He wants, they can be justified. If they have access to Christ and the Word of God, they must put their faith in Him and in His work on the cross. We don't have to sort out who knows what and what they have to know because we can trust God that those who practice the truth (respond to the law of God in their hearts) come to the Light (John 3:21).

**15in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,**

God is concerned about our hearts, the real us. The work of the Mosaic Law is to break us of our pride and to show us that we cannot keep it of ourselves. We need faith in God who will grant us grace and give us the ability to follow after Him. The law of God can only be written on our hearts when we are saved by grace through faith. The conscience confirms within a person's heart whether or not they have been saved. We can know if the law is written on our hearts or not. Good works, true love for others, and increasing understanding of God are all evidences. The inner thoughts of man will either defend their righteousness or condemn them in their evil.

**16on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.**

The day of judgment (which is part of Paul's gospel and it ought to be part of ours) will reveal the true state of the heart of man and the reality of the innermost thoughts and secrets. Who a person really is and where they have put their trust and hope for eternal life and being declared righteous before God will all come to light on the day before the

God who sees all. It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). We should remind people of this reality in our witnessing.

**17But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,**

Paul then addresses the Jews in particular who rely upon the Law as the means of their justification before God. They boast that they are God's people and that they know God while the rest of the world does not and must be therefore condemned, which is not true.

**18and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,**

The Jews Paul addressed thought that they knew the will of God and what was essential for righteousness because they had the Law to teach them.

**19and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,**

They were confident that others needed their insight in order to find God, know God, be righteous, and be saved. They viewed themselves as guides to the blind and as lights to those in darkness, i.e. the Gentiles.

**20a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,**

They saw themselves as superior and not having to be introspective. That they had the Law was their boast and their reliance for salvation. They saw themselves as the wise teaching the fools and as the mature teaching the immature and simple. Just their having the Law was enough to convince them that they themselves possessed the full embodiment of knowledge and of the truth. The rest of the world was inferior and needed their insight.

**21you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?**

Yet there is a great difference between having the Law and doing it. It is not good enough to be merely a hearer of it but one must be a doer of it. They taught others how to live but didn't keep the Law themselves. They would tell someone not to steal according to the Law but go on and steal themselves, yet all the while vindicating themselves because they had the Law. Keeping it is the issue, not possessing it as a Jew.

**22You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?**

Just as they broke the commandment to not steal, they also committed adultery (multiple divorces was common practice at this time as women were treated as far inferior to men),

and they robbed temples by keeping the tithes for their own uses or by not giving to God in the first place as they should have. They hated the idolatry around them of the Gentiles but they made an idol of their own finances.

**23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?**

Paul is trying to show the Jews that they, too, left to themselves are sinners needing redemption. Their boasts in the Law was not going to make them righteous because they broke it. They needed to see and admit that they weren't keeping the Law and that they dishonored God by that fact.

**24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.**

Quoting from Isaiah 52:5, Paul says that, just as it was then, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their failure to keep the Law and have transformed hearts and lives by faith in God. They boast in the Law and live lives that are utterly dishonoring to God all the while to such an extent that even the corrupted and pagan Gentiles are appalled. The testimony of the Jews was terrible, and it kept others from being interested in their God and in His worship and ways.

**25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.**

Circumcision is of value if a person keeps the Law. It is a sign between Israel and God just like baptism is a sign and symbol testifying to a Christian's rebirth in Christ. It has value to remind a person of where they stand in their faith in God. It is a testimony to others as well. There is value in the ordinances that God has ordained. However, the Jews were relying on circumcision in the same way that they were boasting in the Law. They thought if they just had one or the other that they were righteous and better than those who were not circumcised and who did not have the Law. Paul tells them that circumcision is worthless and has become uncircumcision (this is a painful indictment telling the Jews that they are no better than the Gentiles whom they despised) because they do not keep the Law through faith in God.

**26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?**

Paul then goes a step further in saying that the person who is not physically circumcised is considered spiritually circumcised, having the identification as a person of God, if they keep the Law through faith. The issue is how a person is in their heart and how they are spiritually rather than physically and outwardly.



**27And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?**

The one who is physically uncircumcised if he keeps the Law is the one who should stand in judgment over the Jew who, despite having the letter of the Law and circumcision, has broken the Law of God. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul was rebuking those who stood in judgment over others but who did not live up to their own judgment. Here he is saying that even Gentiles who keep the Law will stand in judgment over the Jew who does not. The outward rites are meaningless if there isn't an inward heart reality. The letter of the Law implies that they added to minutia of the Law and judged others upon it. Yet they missed the forest for the trees and failed to love God and others. They needed faith, but they had none.

**28For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.**

What Paul is beginning to explain is that there is a difference between being a Jew by descent or by religion and with being a true son or daughter of God. This is why Peter says that we are a chosen race and a holy nation to God (1 Peter 2:9). Anyone who trusts in Christ's sacrifice by faith is the one who is a spiritual Jew, so to speak. Being a part of God's holy nation and special people has nothing to do with the outward rites and rituals, though they do have value in themselves. The issue of greater importance is the state of a person's heart. As Jesus said, "This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). They needed to be circumcised of their hearts.

**29But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.**

Saving faith is an inward deal and circumcision must be of the heart. God wants people who are obedient to His revealed Word, not those who merely keep external religious rituals while being filthy inwardly in thought and affections. True sonship and priesthood in God is by a rebirth and regeneration of the Spirit, where the heart is changed and the inner man born again. It is not by legalistic rituals and self-gratifying religious performance. Men would praise the pious Jew for keeping the letter of the law, but Paul is saying that it is better to have the approval of God than of men (John 12:42-43). God approves those who repent of their sins and trust in Him by faith.

### **Romans 3**

**1Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?**

The Jews reading this letter would then wonder what good it is to be a Jew in the first place. If the rituals do not save and God is impartial between Jew and Gentile, then is there still any special honor in being a Jew? The answer is that there is a great honor in being a Jew.

**2Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.**

The Jews were given the Word of God. God spoke directly with them. God sent prophets to them. God did great miracles on their behalf and established the most powerful nation on earth until they rebelled. The Son of God came through the line of David and was Himself a Jew. They have the ark of the covenant, the ten commandments, and the sacrificial system which will be reintroduced in the millennial kingdom (Ezekiel 40-48). There is great honor in being a Jew. They are God's people and God will not reject them for their unbelief forever. He promises to eventually write the law of God on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

**3What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?**

Knowing that Israel is still the apple of God's eye, it is important to understand that just because they were unfaithful does not mean that God will forget His promises to Israel. His promises are unilateral and unconditional. Even though they have rejected Him, He will give them hearts to honor Him and give them everlasting honor in and through Christ and His kingdom.

**4May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written,**

**"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS,  
AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."**

God will be true according to His promises no matter what. If man tries to claim that God is a liar, it only further gives evidence that man himself is a liar. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Quoting from Psalm 51:4, Paul shows that God will be justified in His words and prevail when unrighteous man tries to judge Him. Mankind will themselves be judged for making such assertions about the integrity of God.

**5But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)**

We see God's righteousness by His being faithful to keep His promises despite the unfaithfulness of man, particularly of Israel. It is perfectly just for God to inflict wrath in accordance with His righteousness. Unrighteousness will be met with God's wrath because God is righteous. The parenthesis explains that Paul is role playing, acting as a questioner who objects to what Paul is saying. Paul develops and answers the objection before anyone has a chance to think it as the letter is read.

**6May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?**

God is perfectly just to judge the world according to His righteousness and because of the unrighteousness of man. There is no glory that can be credited to man just because God's righteousness is more clearly seen against the backdrop of man's unrighteousness.

**7But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?**

In other words, God is glorified in the fact that His righteousness is more clearly seen. (Role playing again) So if through the unrighteousness and deceit of man God is glorified as His truth is made more evident, then why is man still guilty and judged as a sinner and as one who is unrighteous? In other words, Paul is expecting the listeners to self-justify by saying that their sin gives glory to God because it showcases God's glory. It is ludicrous, but it is what the heart of man does.

**8And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.**

Again, the idea is that, from man's evil, good comes in that it shows how good God is when He is contrasted with man's evil. Some have even said and taught that Paul and the apostles are teaching such nonsense. It is never right to do evil so that good may come because the good God wants is a righteous heart. Any who teach such things and who tell others that the apostles are teaching such things are false teaching, and their condemnation and judgment will be just. They even serve as an illustration of how evil will be punished by God's just wrath.

**9What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;**

Moving on, then, Paul explains that all men are wicked just as those who try to rationalize their own evil behavior. Left to himself, no man is free from the power of evil. All men, Jew and Greek, are under sin. They are enslaved by its power and prone to do its bidding. They cannot by themselves break free. No one is better than any other because all are under sin.

**10as it is written,  
"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
11THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
12ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME  
USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."  
13"THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,  
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"  
"THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";  
14"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";**

**15"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
16DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
17AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."  
18"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."**

Paul explains as Scripture says that no man is righteous, not even one. There are no anomalies and no special cases. No man left to himself understands the things of God or seeks after God. There are no seekers who seek solely because of their own ability to desire and find God. God must draw them by His Spirit. All have turned away from the path of truth and are thus useless for the purposes of God. They are incapable of doing good, as everything they do is by nature self-centered. Everything that comes out of their mouth is deceit and lies. They can't be trusted because they backbite and do not tell the truth. They curse God and others and are downright bitter about their state. They hate, they kill, and they destroy, making misery for all men. No one feels safe. There is no peace because they don't know peace nor can they get on that path by themselves. They have no fear of Almighty God, though they know that they will be judged by Him. Going on in sin, they do not care about how God feels about it. Amazingly, they do not fear His judgment.

**19Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;**

The purpose of the Law of Moses is here revealed. Those who are under the Law are spoken to by the Law, being informed by the Law that they are sinners. The Law is a schoolmaster that leads us to Christ by showing us our sin (Galatians 3:24). It stops every mouth from self-justification because no man has ever kept every point of the Law. Most don't come anywhere even close. The Law clearly defines God's expectations for man so that man knows that for which he is accountable.

**20because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**

Just by trying to keep the Law no person can be saved. No one can be justified by trying to do the works of the Law because no man can fulfill the Law and keep all of the points of it. The sin nature takes the "Thou shalt not..." and lusts after whatever it was told not to do. The Law exposes sin, and it makes it perfectly clear how we have fallen short of God's standards of perfection and holiness.

**21But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**

The work of the Law is to show men their sinfulness and inability to be made righteous before God. Their own lack of ability to keep the Law makes it impossible for any man to fulfill righteousness through the Law. But what man couldn't do, God did through sending Christ. Christ's righteousness was not because He kept the Law, though He did.

His righteousness was inherent in His person. He was born without sin, unlike the rest of man, and He never sinned. He was perfectly righteous, regardless of the Law because He is God and God is the definition of righteousness. The Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets) is full of references to the coming of Christ (Genesis 3:15, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Isaiah 53, etc.) The fact that righteousness had to come from outside of the Law is demonstrated by the fact that Messiah was predicted even before the Law was ever instituted (Genesis 3:15). If the Law had been sufficient, a Messiah wouldn't have been necessary.

**22even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;**

The righteousness of God, since it is not through the Law but apart from it, is through Christ. It is appropriated to those who believe in Christ and put their faith in His work as Messiah rather than in their own work apart from the Messiah. Righteousness is God's and of God. The only way we can attain to it is through a mediator, namely Christ.

**23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

The reason that we cannot make ourselves righteous is because we have all sinned. We were born into sin, being bent to do evil from early on. As such, we do not measure up to the standard of God. We fall short of His glorious perfection and holiness. Man must see the holiness and glory of God as a contrast to his lack of righteousness.

**24being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;**

Just as all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, all have the opportunity through Christ to be justified. The justification is through the grace of God the Father through the buying back (paying for sin and its penalty) of our souls through Christ. We must be redeemed, and the one doing the redemption must be God who does so through the righteousness of Christ. We must respond to His calling through faith and receive the gift of salvation so that Christ's righteousness can be credited to our accounts.

**25whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;**

We must understand that left to ourselves we are at enmity with God. God's wrath is stored up and ready to be poured out in the life to come. But the good news is that God through Christ made a public declaration to the world that He loved us and would make it possible for us to be righteous. God's wrath could be satisfied through the propitiation in Christ's blood. A perfect blood sacrifice of the righteous Lamb of God is the means by which man is saved. The righteousness of Christ is appropriated by faith in the sufficiency of that sacrifice. The giving up of His own Son demonstrated that God would not hold men to the sin that was on their account, assuming of course that they would

receive Christ by faith. This is not a get out of jail free card for all mankind, though all mankind are allowed to receive it should God give them the grace to choose Him. The death of Christ showed God's forbearance in being willing to not hold men to the judgment and wrath that should have been theirs. Yet this forbearance is only appropriated to those who have faith in the Word of God as revealed in the Old Testament or in the time period in which they lived.

**26for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

God demonstrated His righteousness in that chosen time, so near to when Paul was writing. This showed that God is just, not judging man for something that they had no chance to ever be saved from. It also showed that God Himself is the justifier of the person who puts their faith in Christ. Often we credit Christ with doing the act of justification, but it is actually God who does it through Christ. God sent His Son, and we are to thank Him.

**27Where then is boasting? It is excluded By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.**

Justification by faith by definition gives no man the opportunity or grounds to boast. Man's salvation is by the grace of God and not because of any righteousness of his own. No keeping of the Law can generate this righteousness because it is apart from the Law. The law (small "l") of faith precludes that any person can boast in works. This is just the way it works because of God's sovereign plan. The law of faith means that the Law of Moses and the law of works cannot save. Otherwise man would have reason to steal God's glory and boast.

**28For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

The bottom line essential truth that Paul wants to communicate is that man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law. Man's righteousness is found in and through Christ, which has nothing to do with man's own righteousness in keeping the Law.

**29Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,**

If the justification had been through the Law, then only those who had the Law could have been justified. That would mean that Jews could be saved but Gentiles could not. Yet God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles, desiring all men to come to a knowledge of the Son of God.

**30since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.**

Justification is not because of the Law or because of circumcision. God is impartial to Jew and Gentile, saving both through faith.

**1Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.**

Anticipating an objection about the worthlessness of the Law, Paul explains its purpose. The Law is not nullified through faith or because of the fact that righteousness is through faith. The Law is the Law; it just so happens that righteousness comes apart from the Law. What faith does is establish the Law, showing it to be of value and of God. Its purpose is that it shows man that he cannot keep it. Thus faith is the perfect conclusion to the work and testimony of the Law, establishing its purpose and design.

#### **Romans 4**

**1What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?**

Paul now turns the argument to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, to use him as an illustration of how faith worked in the Old Testament. We must note that Abraham existed before the Law of Moses. The question is how was Abraham saved and what role did the Law play in it, if any?

**2For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.**

Keeping the Law requires works and causes man to boast. If Abraham was justified by works, then he too, would have something to boast about. But as Scripture shows, his boasts would be foolishness before God because God doesn't justify based upon works of the Law.

**3For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."**

According to the Scripture, Abraham was justified because he believed God. This faith in the revealed Word of God as He was given (which is far less than what we have, with far less evidence, and what he had was farfetched implying that he would have a son in his old age) was sufficient for God to grant him salvation. Abraham believed God against all reason, trusting and obeying the Word of God as he knew it.

**4Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.**

Paul now gives a practical logical example of how things work. If a person is told that he will be paid a certain wage for doing some labor, it is not a gift or favor for paying him what is his due. In fact, it would be criminal not to pay what that for which the person

was contracted to be paid. What he is paid is what he is due. He has earned his wage through his work.

**5But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,**

However, salvation is not what is justly due us for our labor. Our wage would be death because of our sin. That would be our just due. If we are going to boast, we would have to boast in the fact that we are going to hell and will have to face the wrath of God for eternity. Thus, it makes no sense to boast based upon works because of the wage due for the works. Rather, salvation is given not because of works but to those who believe in the God who justifies the ungodly. Such faith is credited as righteousness. It is the person who realizes and admits that their works cannot save them because of their sin who can then by faith respond to the free gift of God in Christ.

**6just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:**

Even David, another huge Jewish figure, understood and believed that faith is credited because of righteousness and not because of works.

**7"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,  
AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.**

**8"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."**

David said that those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered are blessed. He admits that man has sinned, but he understands that the only path to redemption and justification is through God not holding that sin to their account. Something other than works must accomplish this. It is obviously the grace of God through faith.

**9Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."**

Was the blessing that David was referring to for both Jews and Gentiles, or just for the Jews? We know that faith was credited to Abraham apart from the Law. But, since Abraham was the father of the Jews, did his justification require circumcision?

**10How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;**

According to Genesis, God pronounced Abraham justified before he had been circumcised. God hadn't even ordained that particular sign at the point that Abraham believed by faith. Thus, circumcision as well as the Law are not required for salvation. It



is not based upon works, as illustrated by the life of Abraham, a figure the Jews had to take note of.

**11and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,**

He received the sign of circumcision which was just that, a sign. It was a symbol and seal of the righteousness of the faith he had while he was yet uncircumcised. Like Christian baptism, circumcision was intended to be a testimony outwardly of an inward change by faith in Christ. Abraham is thus the father of all nations, Jew and Gentile, in that everyone who believes in Christ by faith is considered his son or daughter. It is through Abraham that all nations, Jew and Gentile, are blessed because of Christ. Righteousness may be credited to all people since circumcision and the Law are not the defining issues of faith and of salvation.

**12and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.**

Abraham is called the father of the circumcision. This is because of the fact that all of those who receive the grace of Christ through faith are considered the people of God, sealed with a circumcision of the heart and by the Holy Spirit. The circumcision that is through Abraham is ultimately one of the inner man rather than merely an outward sign. This is why he can be a father of circumcision to those who are literally and physically circumcised and to those who are not. The issue is whether or not a person follows in the steps of the faith of Abraham. Paul emphasizes again that Abraham's faith which justified him came before the outward sign of circumcision was established.

**13For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.**

The promise to Abraham and his descendents that he would be heir of the world (Genesis 12:1-3), meaning that he would be a father of many nations and that the world would be blessed through him, was a promise God gave to him not because of or through the keeping of the Law, since it was not yet given. Just like circumcision, the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) also preceded the Law, and thus it, too, was on the basis of faith.

**14For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;**

If somebody could be saved through the Law, then the promise to Abraham would be nullified because he would no longer be the father of all who would believe. He can only be the father of all who believe if they follow in the steps of his faith. If salvation was by

the Law, the Abrahamic covenant cannot come to be and the promise that God made would have to be discounted.

**15for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.**

The outworking of the Law is wrath, since no person can keep it. The Law shows those under the Law their sinfulness. It never saves, and thus could not be a means of making Abraham the father of many nations. Where there is no law (small "l"), there is no violation. As in Abraham's time, there was no law of any kind other than what was by faith written on his heart.

**16For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,**

Since the Law only brings about judgment, wrath, and condemnation, salvation must be by faith in accordance with the grace of God in Christ. The promise to Abraham can only be fulfilled and guaranteed to all of the descendants if the descendants are those who respond to the grace of God in faith. The descendants include not just the Jews who had the Law but those who are of the faith of Abraham. Abraham then is the father of all who have saving faith.

**17(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.**

Abraham's faith and ours is in the presence of God whose Word we must believe in order to be saved. It is God who gives life to the dead (eternal life) and calls into being that which does not exist (a new self and creation in Christ). Specifically for Abraham, this could be referring to allowing Sarah to conceive even though she was approaching her death. Yet God allowed her to conceive, calling into being that which didn't exist.

**18In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."**

Abraham sets a remarkable example of faith, and thus he serves as a proper example of saving faith. He believed in hope against hope that he would become a father of many nations according to the Word of God. He didn't have the faithfulness of God in a written Bible to look back on. He had to trust the revelation as it was given even though it was far-fetched. And to his credit, he did.

**19Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;**

Abraham's faith was not apart from reason, it simply transcended it. He did think through how wonderful and perhaps crazy the promise of God to him was. He thought about his own body and his age and Sarah's body, age, and ability to conceive. He knew he was about as good as dead, given that he was about a hundred years old. Yet despite these facts and the biological impossibility, he trusted God that his wife would conceive and bear a son in her old age. This is great faith that challenges our faith to the core.

**20yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,**

He did not become weak in faith despite knowing all of the practical realities, nor did he waver in unbelief. He didn't vacillate or become double-minded and unstable. He remained totally committed in faith believing that God would do what He said He would do. His faith even grew stronger with time as he gave glory to God through his confidence in His Word. God is praised and glorified when we take Him at His Word and do not waver. If we waver, we cannot expect that we will receive anything from the Lord (James 1:7-8). We must believe His promises.

**21and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.**

The essence of saving faith and how God wants our faith to be is that we are fully assured. Faith is the evidence of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Evidence and conviction speak of confidence and full assurance. We don't see in the sense that we are not in heaven yet, but we have full assurance that we are Christ's and will be with Him forever in paradise. What God had promised, Abraham believed He would also bring to pass. We believe that God has promised to glorify us and finish and perfect our faith. He will do it.

**22Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Abraham's faith was not a passing belief that was there and then gone. It was a steadfast, firm conviction that he staked his life upon. He was absolutely sure that God would keep His Word to him, thus God credited to him righteousness. Abraham was saved through faith in the grace of God since he believed the Word of God with conviction.

**23Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,**

Abraham stands as an example of how God justifies. The account in Genesis was written for a purpose. All of Scripture is for our teaching; none is irrelevant or peripheral. This particular account showed us who would come after him how God chooses to save men so that we would not be confused and try to earn God's favor by works.

**24but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

This example of Abraham's justification serves as an example for us who are credited the righteousness of Christ if we believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead.

**25He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

We must believe also that Christ was delivered because of our sin. We must admit our wrongdoing before God and repent unto salvation. We need to understand this substitutionary death of Christ. He paid the penalty that we should have born by taking upon Himself the wrath of God. When we put our faith in the righteousness of Christ to save us through His sacrifice on the cross, we can be saved. We must believe that Christ was raised from the dead in order to make our justification possible. The gospel doesn't end with the cross or the grave. It ends with the resurrection which proved that sin and death were conquered by Christ and therefore we can have faith and full assurance that we can escape the wages of sin and the lake of fire because of Christ. We know that we can have eternal life in Christ (1 John 5:13).

## **Romans 5**

**1Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

Our justification brings the animosity that God had toward us because of our sin to an end. It gives us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Part of the salvation decision is not a detached asking to get out of jail for free, but it is a surrendering to God as the savior and authority of one's life. It is important to note that, before we respond to the gospel in faith, God is our enemy. He does not love us and have a wonderful plan for our lives, though in a sense He has shown love to us in giving His Son. It is a bit of a paradox. To emphasize God's love without emphasizing His justice and wrath is a half gospel and not the full gospel taught in the Bible. We must be careful to present the truth which starts with God's holiness, then men's fallenness and the consequences thereof, and culminates with the work of Christ and an invitation to respond.

**2through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.**

Our faith is not something that we can boast about in anyway as if we were responsible for it. Our salvation is through Christ who introduced us into faith through His grace. The only way to obtain salvation is through Christ, and in that salvation we stand in full assurance. We can have full assurance of our eternal destiny because Christ's work is sure. If it was up to us or some combination of us and Christ, we should doubt. But since it is all the righteousness of Christ and nothing of us, we can boast in Him and have confidence in our eternity with Him. We can exalt and rejoice in the hope that we have of fully reflecting the glory of God and basking in His presence in worship for eternity.

**3And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;**

In addition to exalting in our future destiny with God in heaven, we are to also exalt in our difficulties and tribulations. We naturally don't like tribulation, but we are also to rejoice in it. There is reason behind this, and the reason is that tribulation and suffering brings about perseverance. It is impossible to persevere if things are easy. It is through the hardship that we are refined.

**4and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;**

As we persevere in confidence in our faith and in the glory of God which is to come, we will find our character and integrity to be shown to be true. We will know who we are in Christ because He enables us to be steadfast and firm in our faith even under duress. This will give us confidence that we are indeed redeemed. This confidence leads to great hope of what is to come because of the faithfulness of God to keep His promises and because of His power to change the desires of a heart. Our perseverance in our faith culminates in giving us great hope in our hearts.

**5and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

Hope does not disappoint. We can be sure that God will keep His promises. Indeed, He has already poured out His love within our hearts through the Holy Spirit which He gave to us. God has come near to man though as before He was afar off. This is great love, and having the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our future place in heaven with Christ (Ephesians 1:14).

**6For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**

Man left to himself is totally helpless to save himself. He is lost, dead in sin, captive to the devil, and unable to do anything to find his way home. He can't seek his way to God, for he is blind. Yet God reaches out and draws a person to Himself. He has demonstrated his love for us by sending His Son to die for the ungodly. We didn't entice God to come to us because we were so loveable and because we made Him smile. We were ungodly and loveless. It was God's mercy to reach out to us in love.

**7For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.**

Humanly speaking, people don't die for anybody, let alone if they are righteous. They are self-centered and want to preserve their own lives. But it is Christ who laid down His life so that we could be saved. Somebody might conceivably, possibly die for another person if they are outstandingly righteous. Yet it is still a stretch.

**8But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

We were certainly not like such a righteous person. We were sinners, but despite that fact, Christ initiated His love, demonstrating it toward us by dying for us on the cross. We didn't merit the love, but God sent Jesus to those who would largely reject Him only because He loved the world (John 3:16).

**9Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.**

Christ justifies us through His blood when we appropriate the truth of the gospel by faith. Part of that equation also is that we will be saved from the wrath of God which is going to be poured out upon sinners. We can exult and have great hope because we can be confident that we will not face the wrath of God. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to how faithful we were as believers, but never will we face God's wrath for sin. Wrath is for enemies, whereas we are children of God.

**10For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

Beginning as enemies (a necessary part of the gospel message), God reached out in love toward us. He reconciled to us through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. We are no longer enemies but friends and even better, children of God. Yet much more will we be saved by His life. We not only identify with Christ's death but also His resurrection. This means that we not only do not have to bear the penalty of sin, but we are given His empowering to live for Him in this life. Granted, none of us do this perfectly, but we ought to be resting more and more in the faithfulness of God who keeps His saints from stumbling and falling.

**11And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

In addition to this, we praise God through Christ who is our Lord because we have received reconciliation. Formerly God was opposed to us because we were opposed to Him. Now we are no longer at enmity with one another.

**12Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**

Through Adam sin entered the world and death through sin. Even though Eve was deceived first, Adam is still responsible for bringing sin into the world. That is the burden of headship; man is ultimately responsible. Death, the consequence of sin and part of the curse, spread to all men. Until the first sin, there was no death and no sin. So because of Adam everybody who would be born after him through his seed would carry

the propensity to sin and the curse of death. To make the point obvious, all men sinned, which we should expect, given their sin nature through Adam.

**13**for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Before the Mosaic Law, sin was certainly in the world, beginning with Adam. Sin, however, is not credited to the account of men when there is no law, however. That doesn't mean that man is off the hook and not guilty. It simply means that the full penalty of the sin is yet to be carried out as the official sentencing has not been given. If a person doesn't know the law, they still are lawbreakers if they break the law. It is just that they do not get punished and declared guilty until the enforcers of the law enforce the penalty. God will enforce the penalty of death, for no person who is a sinner will escape it. Even those who do not have the law, still can by nature do the things of the law and be a law unto themselves. Such is an act of faith and is credited as righteousness, for they obey the revelation that they have.

**14**Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

From Adam until Moses, death reigned as the consequence of sin. Even those who did not sin as Adam did but who were justified by their faith still had to pay the penalty of the first sin which is physical death. Adam, says Paul, is a type of Christ, not in that he reflected the righteousness and perfection of Christ but in that through one man sin entered the world and in the same way through one Man sin can be forgiven.

**15**But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

The free gift of salvation through Christ is different from Adam's sin. Adam's sin caused many to die and be born into sin. However, the grace of God and the gift of grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounds to many. One led many into sin while the other led many to righteousness and justification. In that sense they are polar opposites.

**16**The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.

The gift is different in that it arose from many transgressions which resulted in justification for many. The first sin caused judgment to arise which resulted in condemnation. Adam's sin results in judgment while Christ's work on the cross results in justification. The results are totally different. The only similarity is that one person has such a great effect upon many.

**17For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.**

Death reigned because of the sin of Adam. No man can escape the penalty of sin and the grasp of death. All men die physically and those who remain in their sins also die spiritually, which is the second death. Yet much more wonderful is the abundance of grace through the gift of righteousness through the One, Jesus Christ. Those who receive the gift will reign in life. To know Christ is the definition of eternal life (John 17:3). Being grafted into His life (Galatians 2:20) means that His life and power are given to us to be working in and through us in this life (2 Peter 1:8). The grasp of sin which compels the sinner to do its bidding is broken for the believer who is in Christ. He can still choose to sin as he still has flesh, but he is not forced to be enslaved to Satan's bidding and enticements. He can reign in life by doing the will of God through the power of Christ who is at work in and through him.

**18So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.**

As a sort of summary statement of the argument, Paul says that through one sin came the condemnation of all men. Thus we have the doctrine of original sin, that all men are born with sin and deserving of hell. Yet the positive side is that through Christ all men are able and invited to be justified through Christ. Without the bad news first, the good news of the gospel of Christ doesn't seem so great and grand. When man realizes his eternal destiny apart from Christ, he will be more likely to respond in genuine saving faith through Christ.

The justification of life is for and to all men, though some never receive Him of their own free choice.

**19For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.**

Man was made sinners by birth and nature through Adam's sin, and through Christ's obedience and sacrifice man can be made righteous.

**20The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,**

The Law came in not to save man, for it cannot do that. It came in to increase the sin that was already present even without the Law. The Law shows men their sin and when rules are given, sin moves in men to make them create new ways of sinning and breaking the rules. Yet as sin increased, the grace of God through Christ abounded all the more in that men can be justified through faith because of God's grace which covers all sin, no matter how vast and how despicable.



**2**So that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin reigned in death and it continues to reign for those who have not appropriated the righteousness of Christ. Yet grace reigns through righteousness appropriated to the sinner's account through the work of Christ. Such grace leads to eternal life in knowing Christ, being found in Him, and living with Him forever.

## **Romans 6**

**1**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

Anticipating an objection at this point, Paul is going to explain that just because grace covers sin and more sin means more grace does not justify sinning. It is not right to sin just because more sin requires more grace.

**2**May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Such a thought is totally unbiblical and evidence of a lack of understanding of the purpose, message, and work of salvation in the first place. It makes no sense for a person who by faith in Christ died to sin that they should still continue to live in it. Paul wants us to understand that Christ enables us to reign in life so that we don't have to continue in sin. There is to be a change of desires and a compulsion to love rather than to sin. Those who have been saved may not understand this truth, but they need to. The gospel is a freedom from the grasp of sin so that we can become slaves of Christ. One is either a slave of sin or a slave of Christ.

**3**Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

Just because we have the grace of God which covers all sin does not mean that we should go on sinning. The fact that a person desires to go on sinning is reason to question the fact of whether they have been reborn in the first place. It is a different thing to struggle to appropriate faith for victory in the Christian life than it is to love to sin and flaunting grace as the reason for it. Christ cannot be used as a justification for sin. Such is blasphemous. We as believers have been baptized into Christ in salvation and have been baptized into His death. This means that we literally identified with Christ when He was crucified. Our old selves were nailed to the cross and killed with Christ that day. Yet through His resurrection, we have been given new life in Christ and have been made new creations in Christ. A whole new self is born, and a new heart is generated.

**4**Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

We have spiritually been buried with Christ through baptism into His death so that as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, we like Christ can walk in newness of life. Christ's conquering over sin and death was not a celebration so that He and we could go and indulge every sinful desire and just not have to be guilty for it. It was a setting free from the bondage of sin unto new life and righteousness in Christ. We are not just born into newness of life, but we are to walk in it. We do this by daily appropriating the reality that we are spiritually joined with Christ and indwelt by Him. As such, we are enabled to live in victory over sin.

**5For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,**

We were joined with Him in the likeness of His death and we will certainly also be like Him in the likeness of His resurrection. When Christ died, something within us died if we trust Him by faith. When Christ was raised, a new creation was born within the believer. There is a change and an exchange. The old is gone and all things are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

**6knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;**

This verse is just glorious. We must know and be convinced of what Paul is about to say. Our old self was nailed to the cross and crucified with Christ. The old self was the self that was born from Adam, enslaved to sin and with a sin nature. It was enslaved to the law of sin and death because of Adam's sin. It was helpless to save itself from sinning and from the penalty of death. Yet that body of sin (which is what an unbeliever is) has been done away with. It is executed, crucified, terminated, and out of commission. Crucifixion always leads to death, so we can rest assured that our old man does not still hang around, taunting us, plaguing us, or leading us into a split personality that makes us sin. The life that was lived in sin is gone and over. New life has come as we are made new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Sometimes a mature believer forgets this truth and lives like he is still in the old man. Yet he is not. We must remember and appropriate by faith the fact that the old man is dead and gone. The reason this is so important is that it means that we are no longer slaves to sin. We don't have to go on sinning. It ought to not be normative that the Christian lives in regular sin. This is a massively propagated lie from the devil. Christians live as if it is humble and honorable to admit that they are helpless to keep on sinning as if that is evidence that they needed Christ. The part of the gospel that they are missing is not that they needed Christ. Of course they needed Christ because of their sin. But upon receiving Christ, they do not need to sin any more. That they can reign in life through the resurrection power of Christ and being grafted into His life is either not taught, not understood, or not reckoned to be true. Granted, there is a growth process as we learn truth and take in more spiritual food, but sanctification means ongoing and increasing consecration to God as He through Christ purifies our hearts and minds (Romans 12:1-2).

**7for he who has died is freed from sin.**

The person who has died with Christ on the cross is freed from sin. This needs to be shouted from the rooftops in Christian churches. Sin is not something to be proud of, for it is making a mockery of the work and ministry of Christ in the life of the believer. It minimizes and erases part of the work that He accomplished on the cross. I can't think of anything more insulting to our Lord.

**8Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,**

If we have indeed died with Christ, then we believe (key word) that we shall also live with Him. We live with Him in eternity to come, but we also live with Him now in that He indwells us. Our lives are not our own, but they are Christ's who lives within us. He is our life. We must believe that fact.

**9knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.**

We must know that Christ will never die again because He has been raised from the dead. Death has no power over our Lord or over those who are in Christ. Death is not master over Him and neither does death have to be master over us. Indeed it is not (1 Corinthians 15:55).

**10For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.**

But if death is not master over us, then sin cannot be master either, for death is only the result of sin. Christ's death was to kill the power of sin once and for all. The life that He now lives is to God. He doesn't continue in sin so that grace may abound. In the same way, since we are in Christ, it makes no sense for us to continue in sin. Like Christ, we are to live our lives to God and not to sin.

**11Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

The emphasis from Paul is that we reckon these things to be so. Without faith in these truths, the doctrines are merely academic. The theology must be believed and appropriated. We must believe that we are actually dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. We don't have to give in to the pull of sin on our hearts because in Christ we are dead to it. It has no power over us. We live not seeking sin but Christ who has made us alive and able to resist sin.

**12Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,**

The command from God to us is that we do not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. The body is still subject to physical death but not to spiritual death. It is alive to Christ. As such, sin is not in control but Christ is. We must not yield to the power of sin but we must yield in surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Our mortal body still has flesh which is

alive and well. It lusts after sin. Therefore we must not give our flesh any opportunity. There is a battle that is fought, and temptation (as it was for Christ in the wilderness) is real. We can resist temptation by remembering who we are in Christ and that the old self which was unable to resist sin is gone. Our new heart and new desires in Christ enable the fact that we do not have to succumb to the devils wiles (James 4:7).

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

As those who are alive to God in Christ, we do not need to go on presenting our members as instruments of unrighteousness. We don't have to give them over to do the work of sin. In fact, we are commanded not to. Rather we are to present ourselves to God (Romans 12:1-2) as those alive from the dead. People who are spiritually dead are those who regularly sin. We who are spiritually alive do not have to sin, so we ought not to. We should present our members (thoughts, words, attitudes, directions, ambitions, desires, and actions) as instruments of righteousness. It is on this basis that we will be judged by Christ at His coming. Who better than to judge us? When we choose to sin, we are resisting Him and failing to believe and take advantage of the resources that He gives us because of His death and resurrection. As such, no one knows better how to evaluate us upon our faithfulness and righteousness in our new life in Christ.

**14For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

Sin is not to be master over us because it is not our master. We don't have to let it be our master. We are not under the law of sin and death, compelled by our nature to do what is evil. Rather, we are under grace, which enables us to do what is right.

**15What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!**

Being under grace is not license to sin but rather freedom from sin. That is the essence, message, and power of grace and the gospel. Grace frees us from having to sin. Being in Christ and continuing in sin are incongruous.

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

Just as a slave is expected to obey his master, so the believer is expected to obey Christ. The believer who is mastered by sin must obey that sin. The believer who is in Christ and under grace must obey the Master of righteousness. We are either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. The idea of being a slave of righteousness has been removed from the contemporary gospel message probably because it is unappealing. This is our new identify and reality is Christ: we are His slaves. This is a good thing because there is

no better Master to have. It is a beautiful and restful thing to be in submission to the Protector and Guardian of our souls.

**17But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,**

Paul praises God for those to whom he is writing because they had been slaves of sin but they became obedience from the heart (it is always an issue of whether or not we are reborn and transformed on in the inner man). They followed the teaching of the gospel of Christ and were committed to it.

**18and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**

As great examples of what Paul is trying to communicate, these Christians became slaves of righteousness, holding to the teaching of Christ and appropriating the fact that they were freed from sin.

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

Yet there seems to be a falling away since the time these believers became slaves of righteousness. If they had been more spiritual, Paul would have tried to explain these things differently. They had chosen to present their members as slaves of impurity which resulted in further lawlessness. Even though we are not under law (in the sense that we are subject to its penalty), we can still violate the standards and rules of God. The joy of salvation is that it enables us to keep the substance of the law, which is loving God totally and loving our neighbors as Christ loved us. Paul now tells them to get their acts together and remember what they first knew. They need to present their members as members of righteousness which will result in their sanctification. Though sanctification is by grace through faith, we must choose to have faith so that we can be sanctified into becoming more and more like Christ. Obedience is a key word for the Christian life.

**20For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.**

When they were slaves of sin, they were free in regard to righteousness. They were not able to be righteous no matter what they tried. Being children of hell, they were not enslaved to Christ because they had not made Christ their Master. But as believers, He is their Master, and He must be obeyed. This is true freedom.

**21Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.**

Paul reminds the believers to reflect upon their experience before knowing Christ. He asks them to reflect upon what the benefits of living according to sin were. Why are they

now ashamed of such things if sin was so grand and glorious? Sin always has a bad after taste and it always bites a person in the back. The outcome of sin is death, so why keep living as if they are ones dead when they are truly alive? Indeed, it is possible for a believer to live like an unbeliever. They will be judged for their unfaithfulness, and other believers must confront them and try to gain reconciliation and repentance from them.

**22But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.**

There is great benefit in being a slave of God and freed from sin. The benefit is sanctification which has as its outcome, eternal life. It is not that eternal life is compromised by the unfaithfulness of true believers. It is rather that they are missing out on the fullness of the abundant life which Christ promised (John 10:10) which is found only in obedience to Christ. Such obedience leads to becoming like Christ and knowing Him more, which results in more of the fullness of the joy of the life that is in Christ and is eternal.

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

The consequence of sin is death. Hell is just in regard to the sinner. But the good news is that through Christ God has provided the free gift of salvation which leads to eternal life. Why as believers would we keep wanting to sin and choosing to do so? Sin only and always leads to disaster, harm, and destruction. Spiritually it will kill us if it doesn't also physically. It will not take away our inheritance in Christ but it will and can totally impair our ability to be productive in anyway for the kingdom. We will be judged for our unfaithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:10). Why not rather live sanctified lives as evidence of our eternal life in Christ, which is yet to come in all of its fullness and when it does come will be totally wonderful and utterly glorious? Salvation is free, it is a gift, and it is through Christ. These are exclusive, limiting truths, yet they are loving, gracious, and extended to all. Christianity stands as a unique "religion" because of grace and salvation as a free gift.

## **Romans 7**

**1Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?**

Paul uses marriage to illustrate the working of the law. The law, he says, has jurisdiction over a person only as long as he lives. How can one be expected to live according to customs, rules, and laws if they are dead? The law only applies to those who are alive.

**2For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.**

The married woman is bound to her husband by law while her husband lives. If her husband dies she is released from her duties to faithfulness to her husband. In other words, the only way to undo the marriage covenant and bond is for one of the marriage partners to die. Not even divorce or adultery release a person from the law concerning faithfulness to their husband or wife. However, if a person does marry another, they are to stay married to them, or else they will do double the damage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

**3So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.**

If the wife does commit adultery with another man while her husband still lives, she is just that, an adulteress. She can, however, marry another man if her husband has first died.

**4Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.**

Paul then takes the marriage principles and transfers them to his treatise on Law and grace. Through Christ, believers died to the Law so that they could become the body of Christ, joined to one another and with Christ as the head. The purpose of new life in Christ is to bear fruit for God. Thus it makes no sense to live under the influence of sin when God calls us to live new lives in Christ which bear abundant fruit. The Law shows men their sinfulness and causes them to choose to “die” in Christ by trusting in Him by faith. The Law only has the right to enforce its consequence as long as the person is alive in their old nature and in their sin. When they trust Christ by faith, their old man dies by being crucified with Christ. This is the ultimate end of the Law, which shows its value.

**5For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.**

While we were in the flesh (meaning that we were still in the old man), the sinful passions which were our identity were only aroused to more sin because of the commands of the Law. Just like telling a young child not to do something almost guarantees that they will do it and see what happens, so too the Law makes sin to increase. The only fruit that the unregenerate person can bear is that which leads to death and stores up judgment for himself.

**6But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.**

As believers, we are released from the Law because we died according to it. The Law showed us that we could not keep it, and thus it “killed” us. We only truly and fully die to the Law when we then repent and trust in Christ by faith. Now as believers we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter of the Law. In other words, we do

not try to earn our way to God by keeping the minutia of the Law. Rather, we let the Spirit guide us and lead us into all truth and righteousness, and He will enable us to honor God apart from the Law, though not in contradiction to it.

**7What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."**

Just because the Law produces the desire to sin more does not mean that it is sin. The Law serves its purpose in showing us our sin. For example, the Law in saying, "Do not covet," reveals coveting in the heart of the hearer. This shows the hearer that they are guilty and a transgressor of the Law.

**8But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.**

The sin isn't in the Law but it is in man. Sin, upon hearing of a new way to sin, produces every kind of coveting possible. Sin is present and sufficient for condemnation apart from sin. However, the Law awakens the sin, and it causes it to abound. The Law makes us increasingly aware of the pervasiveness, grasp, and reality of sin in our hearts which is a stepping stone in leading us to the cross.

**9I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;**

The Law comes in and kills any illusion of the person being alive apart from Christ. They are not spiritually alive, but they may be deceived into thinking they are. Romans 1:32 said that all men inherently know morality and the law of God. The issue here is that the sensitivity toward lawbreaking and sinning against God needs to be raised. The commandment causes sin to become recognizable and active, and its end is death as the person gives into the sin and realizes who they are apart from Christ.

**10and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;**

It never works to rely upon self-effort to save. Commandments appear to have life-giving ability, but in the end they cannot save. The end of the Law is always to show a person their utter sinfulness and cause them to die to the hope of thinking that they are inherently good.

**11for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.**

Sin takes advantage of commandments, deceives the sinner, and kills him by showing him that he cannot keep them. The commandment can only produce more lust and more sin.



**12**So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The Law itself is not sin or sinful, however. It is holy and righteous and good. Its work is not to save but to point the sinner to his need for a Savior.

**13**Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

The Law is not the source of death for the sinner as if the sole responsibility of sin is to be placed upon it. Rather it is the sin that is in the sinner that causes him to rebel against the Law that is the problem and the issue. The Law shows the inadequacy and depravity of man, which is a good thing for it to do. The Law causes sin to become utterly sinful. Sin when it is not confronted or shown for what it really is can seem dead and tame. When the Law confronts the sinner, the Law leaves him understanding the depth of his sinfulness. Before giving the good news about Christ (unless a person is already broken over sin), they need to see their own exceeding sinfulness as measured by the Law of God, which is good.

**14**For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

The Law is spiritual, holy, righteous, and good. It is of God and given by God for its intended purpose of showing the sinner his exceeding sinfulness. Yet the sinner is of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. Note that this passage cannot be talking about a believer! The believer, as the whole last chapter explained, is not a slave to sin. He is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. As such, the only person who can be of flesh and in bondage to sin must be an unbeliever. Paul is not saying that he is an unbeliever. Rather, he is role playing, continuing to show what happens to a person when they are confronted by the Law.

**15**For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

The unbeliever does not understand what he is doing in that he sets his minds to do something good, but ends up doing something bad. Part of him doesn't like the fact that he is experiencing the harmful effects of sin, but because of the sin that indwells him he is unable to break and escape from its effects. In one part of his being, he dislikes his compulsion and enslavement to sin, while in another part he fulfills the lusts of his flesh. There is a losing battle going on inside of the unbeliever. Sin is bringing about its work of death. If this was literally an autobiographical narration of Paul's present condition near the end of his life and ministry then we would have to conclude that not only does Paul not understand why he keeps on sinning but in addition he still keeps practicing sin and doing the things he hates. This makes Paul a habitually sinning believer, which is not a healthy position, particularly for one presently writing Scripture. James would tell him

that his faith is dead because of his lack of works. 1 John 3:9 says, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Based upon this verse, Paul is not born again because he is practicing sin. Yet we know that Paul is born again and that he has a great reputation before the church. Thus, it makes sense to understand this passage as Paul narrating the account of how the Law affects an unbeliever and leads them to die to sin and become alive to God in Christ.

**16But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.**

When the unbeliever does the very thing that he does not want to do, he is affirming, whether expressly or unknowingly, that the Law is good. He is agreeing with the Law that sin is not something that he wants to do, yet he does it anyways. The Law is right to say that sin is sin and destruction is destructive.

**17So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.**

What this compulsion to sin serves to prove is the fact that the unbeliever is not free. He is a slave to sin and it is the indwelling sin that dictates his behavior. In that sense, he is not the one acting, but the sin. In a parallel fashion, the believer would say that it is not him acting but it is Christ in him giving him the strength. Yet, for both the believer and unbeliever, there is still human responsibility. We choose to either be slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. By the grace of God, some respond in faith to His call. If the believer had indwelling sin, then how could Christ indwell his body? God's presence can't be in the presence of sin. Again, this must be referring to an unbeliever. The believer is not indwelt by sin but by the Holy Spirit.

**18For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.**

The unbeliever is known and identified by his flesh. He is in the flesh and of flesh. He doesn't just walk according to it or after it, but he is it. There is nothing good in his essence. The willing is present but the doing is not. Certainly an unbeliever tries to do good at times and doesn't enjoy defeat and enslavement. Yet he is unable to have enough willpower to actually do what he wants to do. Some people's flesh is more well-adjusted than others, and they get farther against sin than others. But they all fall short.

**19For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.**

There are many religious people who desperately want good to be done and even some who want Jesus to be glorified. Yet they may not be born again. The mere desire to do good is far from the actual essence and possession of righteousness and goodness which can only be imputed through faith in Christ. What sets the believer apart from the unbeliever is not that he wants to do good but that he actually is able to do it and then does it. The unbeliever, though desiring to do good, practices the very evil that he

doesn't want to do. He is enslaved. One thing to ask an unbeliever who is struggling is if he likes his situation or if he feels hopeless to fix it. If he answers either question positively, such a person is broken before the Law of God and far more open to the gospel than a person who thinks he has his flesh under control.

**20But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.**

Again, Paul emphasizes that when the unbeliever does what he does not want to do, it is sin which indwells him that is doing it. The issue is that sin is the boss and the master and that he and his willpower are not. He is a slave to sin, though he is still responsible for his enslavement, seeing that Christ has made a way of escape and since God has abundantly revealed Himself through creation, conscience, and His Word.

**21I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.**

The general principle governing the unbeliever is that evil is present in the one who wants to do good. This is the conclusion that a person must come to before they can respond in faith to the gospel. It is no good to just take Christ for a joyride hoping to get just that, more happiness in life. Christ is the antidote to sin. A person must own up to the fact that they are evil, and then they must repent. They may have good motives, desiring to do good, but their essence is evil because of sin in which they were conceived through Adam.

**22For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,**

The unbeliever who wants to do well and improve in terms of his unrighteous behavior believes in his inner person that the law of God is good. He knows the law intuitively because God has placed it upon His conscience. It is a rare person who thinks that people would be better off if they didn't follow the law of God. It is irrational to suppose that killing, stealing, lying, and committing adultery all going unchecked is healthy for individuals or for society.

**23but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.**

Despite the desire and longing to be righteous, there is a problem with bringing the body into submission to the law of God. Thoughts and behaviors keep indulging evil lusts no matter how much the desire is for good and for change. There is a war waging in the mind and heart of the unbeliever. It is a war that he cannot win, making him a prisoner of the law of sin and death which is reigning in his body and mind. He cannot free himself. This is the desperation that he must come to. Let me emphasize that Romans 8:2 makes it clear that believers are set free from the law of sin in and through Christ. Paul was not a prisoner of sin and neither are believers, praise God.

**24Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?**

Paul, understanding this from his own experience perhaps more than most because of his track record before coming to Christ, declares (identifying with the sinner since he once was one) that he is a wretched man. The unbeliever must come to the place where he realizes just how wretched and depraved he is. He must get to the point where he is sick of himself and his enslavement to sin. He must give up his pride and call to Christ who alone can save him and free him from his flesh and his bondage to sin and death.

**25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.**

Christ alone is the answer as he was for Paul and the believers who would read this letter. Thus Paul expresses his thanks for the salvation that is in Christ which he has found. The unbeliever wants to love God with his mind, but he is unable to. As Romans 8:5 says, those who are of the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Only when we are born again of the Spirit can our minds be set upon God. The unbeliever agrees that the Law is good, but he is unable to serve it because of his enslavement to sin and the flesh. Romans 8:7 makes it clear that the unbeliever cannot subject his mind to the law of God. The believer is set free from having to do the bidding of his flesh. If we choose to live out the lusts of the flesh, we will serve the law of sin and re-subject ourselves to our old masters, sin and Satan. Yet we are not bound there. Upon repenting and appropriating the blood of Christ, we are forgiven and free. There is no reason for a believer to stay in sin or get swallowed up by it. We have the power in Christ to not have to serve our flesh.

## **Romans 8**

**1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Therefore, since Jesus is the only one who can set the unbeliever free from the law of sin and death, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The person who had made the decision to surrender to Christ will not stand condemned. While he was an unbeliever, his own conscience condemned him. His mind also condemned him because he would think of doing good but fail to do it. Thus, any rational man understands that he stands condemned and guilty before God. The good news for believers is that they have been declared righteous and free from sin and the wrath of God once and for all. They are in Christ Jesus, and He will never let them go.

**2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**

Paul introduces now a different law which is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. This law has set the believers to whom Paul is writing free from the law of sin and death. What is this law of the Spirit? This is the grace of God through faith in Christ. This is the only way man can be set free from the penalty of sin.

**3For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,**

The Law was weak, though good. It could not save man but only point him to the Savior. What the Law couldn't do, God did, sending Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh (though without sin) and as an offering for sin. Christ alone can satisfy the wrath of God, and we find our life in Him. God Himself condemned sin in the flesh by delivering His own Son up who was in the flesh. The only way that man could be redeemed was for God Himself through the Person of Christ to come to earth as a man and die for man. Through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, God has condemned sin in the flesh.

**4so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

None of us could have ever kept the Law of God left to ourselves because of our sin natures. The only way the Law can be fulfilled is through Christ, who did indeed fulfill the requirements of the Law in perfect holiness and righteousness. The believer, then, does not walk according to the flesh, for the flesh no longer has any power over him, though it is still present. Rather, the believer walks according to the Spirit. The unbeliever was of flesh and in the flesh, and he characteristically walks according to the flesh. The believer is born of the Spirit and of the Spirit. As such, there is a change in outward behavior because of this inward transformation. He is to walk according to the Spirit.

**5For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**

The unbeliever is fleshly and thus sets his mind on the things of the flesh. His thoughts are not dominated by spiritual things but rather by evil things. He may try to think good things and through willpower do good things, but he is destined to fail because his mind is depraved and according to the flesh. The believer sets his mind on the things of the Spirit which is whatever is good, right, noble, pure, and so on. His meditation is upon the Word of God day and night (Joshua 1:8). He not only hears the truth but is able to then do it.

**6For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,**

The mind set on the flesh is death, which the unbeliever will experience. The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. The believer is free from having to lose the war to his flesh. He is able by faith in the life of Christ to walk in victory over sin. There is peace with God and the peace of God to go with him each day. This peace is not the incentive to be saved (righteousness is), but it is a fruit of the Spirit resulting from salvation. Thus, it is something that the unbeliever cannot have.

**7because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,**

The unbelieving mind which is set on the flesh is at enmity with God. It hates God and acts accordingly even in spite of an admission that the law of God is good. It does not subject itself to the law of God because it cannot. It must admit its wretchedness and call out to Christ for salvation.

**8and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. This is the bottom line. Man can't work his way to God or make himself righteous because of an internal malfunction due to sin. His behavior is in line with the depravity with which he is born. This is further evidence for Romans 7:14-24 speaking about the unbeliever, as is the next verse. If we were still in the flesh as Romans 7:14 indicates, we could not please God. However, we know we can please God because with faith it is possible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). The believer may walk after the flesh, but he is not of the flesh or in the flesh.

**9However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**

The believer is not in the flesh but in the Spirit. There is a change of master and the believer is free from bondage to do the bidding of the flesh. The Spirit of God indwells the believer, not sin. Those who are in the flesh have indwelling sin which governs their behavior. The believer has the Spirit of God governing his. All those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of God.

**10If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

This verse must be taken in context with verse 11. The believer has both Christ and the Spirit indwelling him. Our inner man is being renewed day by day while our outer man decays (2 Corinthians 4:16). Our outer man, the body, is still subject to the curse of physical death. In this sense the body is dead. This is different than the body of sin, which is the old man. The body is merely our mortal form that will pass away (see v. 11). When we die, we will be given a new spiritual body which is immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53). In the meantime, our inner man, our spirit, is alive because of the righteousness of Christ.

**11But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**

We know that the Spirit indwells the believer. If this is the case, says Paul, then God who raised Christ from the dead will also raise our mortal bodies through His Spirit Who

indwells us. We can be sure that even our body will be transformed into that which is incorruptible and immortal.

**12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—**

What is the point of Paul going through all of this doctrine and theology? It is so that the believers understand how to live in victory and so that they go ahead and live in a way that is honoring to God. The believer has no obligation to the flesh. The believer is indwelt by the Spirit and not subjected to the power of sin. Even the mortal body will be changed when we die and go to be with Christ. There is nothing that compels us to be under obligation to the flesh or to live according to the flesh. Such is contradictory to what is fundamental about being a Christian.

**13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

If a person is living out of the flesh, of the flesh, in the flesh, and according to the flesh, then they are not saved and will perish eternally. If however, a believer chooses to indulge his flesh, he must remember from whence he came and repent, dying to self and living to Christ. The context is trying to create a dichotomy between unbeliever and believers based upon outward behavior and fruit. This is not unique to this passage (see Matthew 7:16-20 and 1 John 3:9). The exhortation is to the believer to put to the death the deeds of the body, in which the flesh still hangs on. This is not to say that the body of sin which was put to death in Christ (Romans 6:4, 6) is still alive and part of us. 2 Corinthians 5:17 makes it clear that the old man has passed away because we are a new creation in Christ in which all things (not just some things) have become new. The only thing which that doesn't include is the mortal body which needs to be changed into an immortal body (this ought to be obvious given that our bodies are still the same after creation, still prone to the effects of sin and sickness, and decaying every day). All the aspects of the inner man are reborn, while the outer man decays each day. There is no more body of sin, praise God! We don't have to battle our old nature. All we have to do is reckon our old nature dead and remember that we do not have to serve the flesh. The battle is for faith in God's Word, not against an imaginary evil self. The old self has passed away having been crucified with Christ. Habits, thoughts, and feelings must all be taken captive under the authority of Christ so that that which is fleshly is dropped and that which is spiritual adopted. This is the process of sanctification as Christ makes us more like Himself. This is evidence that the inner man is alive and that even the body will be raised to an immortal form to enter into eternity.

**14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

This confirms what Paul is trying to say in the previous verses. He is saying that an identifying and defining characteristic of believers is that they are led by the Spirit of God which they have indwelling them. Thus, the Spirit will lead the believer to repent of behaviors that are not honoring to God. He will convict him of sin as need be. He will

continue to lead the believing in the sanctification process. He will lead us to know God more intimately and guide us in our prayers (Romans 8:26-27). He will teach us all things (John 14:26). The unbeliever doesn't have this, and thus he is stagnant, even decaying in righteousness and holiness. The believer is to be in an ongoing sanctification process. If a believer is holding on to a sin, brothers and sisters in the Lord ought to confront and encourage him to change.

**15For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"**

Our adoption as sons of God indwelt by the Spirit of God is not something that brings with it a spirit of slavery leading to fear again. We do not have to fear death, hell, or the inability to overcome the lusts of the flesh. We can rush to our Papa in heaven and cry out to Him, "Daddy!" We are safe as children of the Most High God. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:29). The law of sin and death has no hold on us anymore.

**16The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,**

The Spirit within us testifies with our spirits that we are indeed children of God. Our spirits rush to our Father as if we are sons and daughters, and the Spirit of God within us confirms that we are indeed His children. We are led of Him and He confirms our identity as heirs of God. The Spirit's testimony within our spirits is another way that we can know if we are saved. When He is grieved, when He convicts, when He teaches, when He helps with prayer, and when He leads, we can have further confidence of our adoption into the family of God.

**17and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.**

Heir carries with it an additional implication besides simply being a child of God. An heir gets an inheritance and all the rights and privileges of family. We are joint inheritors with Christ of the kingdom and of eternal life with God. Christ is the Son of God, and we are also called sons of God. It is quite a picture and a wonderful honor. Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, so we too will suffer while we are yet on this earth. If they hated Him and persecuted Him, they will do the same to those who love Him. Yet our suffering with Him and for Him proves even more that we are heirs of God with Christ who will also one day be glorified with Him.

**18For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

The suffering of our brief time on earth is nothing when compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. The picture of the unbeliever mired in sin wasn't something to be longed after, so the mere fact that we have to put up with persecution for our faith is not such a big deal when weighed against the fact that we will be with God for eternity. In



heaven, there will be no more suffering. We will behold the glory of God; absolutely nothing can compete with how awesome that will be.

**19For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.**

Creation itself longs eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. Even all of the created order is looking forward to who will be declared justified and adopted into the family of God formally and officially on the day of Christ.

**20For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope**

The creation has been subjected to futility because of the curse. It cannot be redeemed as man can be redeemed. It has to wait until the King of Kings sits on the throne and creates a new heaven and a new earth. Then the creation will praise God as it was intended to. For now, it is stuck in the futility of dealing with disease and decay. This wasn't something that the creation willingly chose to do. It didn't choose to sin. God Himself chose to put creation in subjection for a time and for a purpose.

**21that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**

The creation also will be set free from its slavery to corruption, and it will be put into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. It will one day share the freedom from the effects of sin that we are beginning to experience now. Upon our glorification and revelation as the sons of God, our freedom will be even fuller. At that time, the creation, too, will be set free.

**22For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.**

In the meantime, the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together. Only now does creation have a hope that just as man has been set free, so it too will be set free. Just as the birth pangs lead to great joy in childbirth, so too are the pangs going to intensify before things get resolved. Most of heaven and earth will be destroyed during the great tribulation, but God will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth, freed from corruption.

**23And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.**

We are the firstfruits of God in the Spirit, having been redeemed before the rest of creation was restored. Yet we too have reason to groan in our spirits, for we are still battling the flesh and dealing with the corruption that is in the world through sin. One

day, we will be adopted formally as sons, though it is as good as done already. At that point, our bodies will be fully redeemed. For now, we still have corruptible bodies that are not redeemed practically and officially. They, however, are promised to be fully redeemed. One day the mortal will become immortal and the corruptible be raised incorruptible. He has promised to also give life to our mortal bodies, though we can be sure that our spirit and soul is totally redeemed already.

**24For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?**

Our salvation gives us hope because of what has been done and because of what will be done. We can be sure that God will complete the work He has begun in giving life to our mortal bodies as well. Yet our hope remains because the full restoration of our bodies hasn't happened yet, though it will.

**25But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.**

If we hope for what we do not see (the redemption of our bodies and the day of our revelation as the sons of God), we will persevere in the present time and place in faithfulness, keeping hope alive and eagerly waiting for that which is to come. There is much to look forward to for the Christian. The unbeliever had better fear, but the Christian can get ready for the celebration and marriage feast of the Lamb. Our inheritance is coming soon.

**26In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;**

Another ministry of the Spirit is to help us in our weakness. Left to ourselves we are not even able to do the simplest of Christian exercises in prayer. We do not know how to pray as we should. We are often confused as to what to say, how to say it, and how to discern the will of God. Yet we have the Spirit to help us pray as we should. He intercedes for us with groanings that are too deep for words. In other words, the Spirit ascertains what our true heart's desires are and enables us as we yield to Him to be able to express those longings to God through Christ. His intercession is to go beyond our words and find the true meaning and intention of our hearts and minds and then to give those requests to Christ who brings them to God the Father.

**27and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**

Christ, who searches the minds and hearts determines what the mind of the Spirit is. He is able to do this because of His ministry of intercession for the saints according to the will of God. It is through Christ that we can approach God and go before His throne in confidence.

**28And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**

God causes everything in the life of the believer to work for the good of the believer and other believers around him. It is only those who are called by God unto good works that have this promise of God working all for their good. The unbeliever has no such assurances.

**29For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;**

Here we get a picture behind the scenes as God works throughout human history. God knew beforehand who would come to know Him. He ordained that they would receive Him for He knows all things. This does not mean that people did not choose of their own free will to respond to God's call. God doesn't force the table, though He knows the results. Only God can predestine and allow free will to coexist at the same time. We need not resolve the matter. Those whom He knew would be His children He ordained to become conformed to the image of His Son so that that Jesus would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. God is making a family for Himself of those who have placed their faith in Christ. All believers will be conformed to the image of Christ because God will complete the work He has started. Some may fall away and others will be weak and struggle. The good news is that God will welcome all home, and He will give each the place, honor, and role that they have demonstrated that they can handle based upon their faithfulness while on the earth (Luke 19:11-27).

**30and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.**

Those who were foreknown were predestined and also called. God knew that they would come to faith and He effectually drew them to Himself. Those who responded in faith to His call were also justified because of their faith. One day, their sanctification process will be complete and they will be glorified so that they can enter the presence of God with a body that is incorruptible and free of sinful effects and influences.

**31What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?**

If God has called us, we can be sure that He will also glorify us. If He is working on our behalf to make all things work for our good and our sanctification, nothing and nobody can stop Him. If He is going to adopt us as Sons, it is as good as done. Our hope is sure, and we will not be disappointed.

**32He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**

God has demonstrated His heart in giving up His own Son to die for us. In light of that fact, we can be sure that He will not keep our inheritance from us. If He has been so generous already, we can be sure that He will keep the remainder of His promises to us.

**33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;**

Christ intercedes on behalf of the saints. As such, our identity is found in His righteousness. Satan is the accuser of the believers, but not even he will be able to bring a charge against God's elect that can stand. God has justified, and nothing can undo that fact.

**34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.**

Nobody can condemn us for our salvation is secure in Christ who died for our sins, who was raised to sit at God's right hand, and who intercedes on our behalf. His present ministry is to assure our salvation before God. His life, death, and resurrection is sufficient to keep believers from the wrath of God and condemnation that the unsaved will face in hell.

**35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

There is nothing and no one that can separate us from the love of Christ. No amount of difficulty and distress in this life will be able to keep God from keeping His promises. No matter what we endure in this life, we can be sure that our citizenship is sure in heaven, for we are children of God. God will not forsake His children, no matter what. The difficulties of this life only make us more eager and ready to inherit the next.

**36 Just as it is written,**

**"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;  
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."**

For the sake of our faith in Christ, we will suffer as believers. Paul's life was in constant danger and he was nearly killed many times. Perhaps he is thinking of his own life's experience as he closes this section of the letter. With all that he has been through and as vulnerable as he has been (like a sheep which can't defend itself), God has sustained him. He has never found himself outside of the love of God, and God has indeed caused all things in his life to work out for good, namely his sanctification and the advancement of the gospel of Christ.

**37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.**

No matter what adverse circumstances we may face as believers, we are overcomers and conquerors through Christ. Our strength is not because of our own cleverness, willpower, or toughness, but it is Christ's strength and power that is at work in and through us. We

can endure all things because we know where we are going, even if some things take our dignity or even our life. We will conquer death just as we have conquered sin in and through Christ.

**38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,**

Not even death or the things of this world, not even the powers of darkness, and nothing in the past or the present or the future can separate us from God's love.

**39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Nothing that has been created, and no distance far or near can remove us from the love of God in Christ our Lord. Our salvation is secure, our glorification certain, our sonship guaranteed, and our inheritance forthcoming. We have much to hope in, look forward to, and praise God for in this life and in the next.

## **Romans 9**

**1I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,**

**2that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.**

**3For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,**

Switching gears, Paul goes on to share about how his heart breaks for the people of Israel because of their hardness of heart. He goes so far as to say that he wishes that his own soul was in jeopardy of hell if only his physical brethren of Israel would repent and trust in Christ for their salvation. His sorrow and grief over the eternal destiny for Israel serves as a great example of how we should feel over the lost.

**4who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,**

**5whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.**

Israel was called out by God to be His people. They had the covenants and were given the Law. They were given promise after promise, most importantly the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12. They had the temple and priests of God to do service in His presence. They had the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whose line Christ descended. They had the great kings, most importantly David, through whose line Christ came. Christ is over them all, yet they do not respond in faith to Him, having rejected Him by and large as the Messiah. Christ is blessed by God forever, but what about the nation of Israel?

**6But it is not as though the word of God has failed For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;**

**7nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but:  
"THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."**

**8That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.**

**9For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."**

Even though Israel has rejected Christ, it is not as though God's promise to Abraham to make him a father of many peoples has failed. Indeed, not all who are descended of Abraham are just Israelite by descent. Those who followed Abraham's example of saving faith are also considered to be his offspring.

**10And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;**

**11for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,**

**12it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."**

**13Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."**

Paul explains how Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, had two sons who were twins, Esau and Jacob. A prophecy was given concerning the twins before they were even born that the older would serve the younger. This was before either had made any choices for good or for evil. This demonstrates again that faith is not on the basis of works, but on the God who calls one to saving faith. He knows beforehand who will make the right choices and who will respond in faith to the sacrifice of Christ. The issue ultimately is God who must ultimately get the glory for any person's salvation. He is the author of faith (Hebrews 12:2). God hated Esau but loved Jacob. One would follow God and the other wouldn't. God knew that and without overriding free will, ordained one for good and one for evil.

**14What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!**

**15For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."**

**16So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.**

Paul, deflecting an objection that he assumes the reader would make, says that God is not unjust to allow one to be ordained for good and the other to be ordained for evil. This is an area where God has the final say and the only ability to understand how the whole process of salvation comes together. He will have compassion on those whom He wants and He will have mercy on those whom He wants. Salvation is ultimately in the hand of God, though He desires all men to come to know Him. Thus, it is not Biblical to conclude that God forces or sentences someone to hell. God lets every man make their

own choices, though He is sovereign over all things. How the two coexist is beyond our ability to understand, but we must take it by faith. Salvation is ultimately an act of God who initiated love in sending Christ and who calls men to respond to Him. It is not based first and foremost upon man's will or ability to make decisions. It is first about the God who wills all things according to His good pleasure.

**17For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."**

**18So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

Scripture says repeatedly that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh was an instrument in God's hand to accomplish His purposes. As Proverbs 21:1 says, God turns the heart of the king wherever He wishes. God used Pharaoh to proclaim His own name. If Pharaoh had repented and relented, then God wouldn't have had to do all ten plagues or cause the sea to be divided. God's plan from the beginning was to showcase His power and His love for Israel. He had just allowed Israel to be enslaved for 400 years in Egypt. Why did He do that? We don't know, other than it made the exit from Egypt all the more wonderful and memorable. It served as a testimony to surrounding nations and as a point of remembrance for the people of Israel. God has mercy as He desires and hardens hearts as He desires. It is His prerogative. Man still makes decisions and is responsible. The two dynamics coexist, but ultimately God does everything to His own glory and so should we.

**19You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"**

Paul anticipates a reasonable and logical objection at this point. Why would God still find fault if He has caused a person to harden his heart? Why is the person still responsible for something that God has done? After all, if God wills something, who can possibly resist it?

**20On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?**

Yet this is like the answer God gave Job about why he allowed all of the suffering to come into his life- He didn't. God didn't give an answer, and He is not forced to have to explain how all of these things work together. If He did, it would probably cause our brains to short out. It is not our position to tell God how to run the universe. It is not our prerogative to say to God, "Why have you made me like this or done so and so?" God will do as He wishes, and we must submit to His sovereignty in the universe. He is not mocked. Man reaps what he sows (Galatians 6:7). This is only possible if God is in complete control over all things in the universe, including the state of man's hearts.

**21Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?**

**22What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?**

It makes no sense for the clay which has been molded to tell the potter that he is making it wrong. The potter is the brains behind the operation; the clay is subject to the will and mercy of the potter. It is the same with our Heavenly Father. We are but dust, and to dust we will return. What He makes of our lives is in His hands. We must choose to live by faith and trust Him as He gives us grace to do so. Grace wouldn't be grace if we could will our way to faith and repentance. Any Christian is a result of the mercy of God at work. God has the right to make one pot for honorable use and another for dishonor. Paul explains that God is very likely willing to go ahead and pour out His wrath immediately upon the vessels of dishonor who sin and deserve God's punishment because they reject Him as God. Paul explains that it may be that God allows the dishonorable vessels to exist so that He can showcase His mercy to the honorable vessels. By allowing the vessels of wrath to go unpunished for a time, it allows God to demonstrate His power in being able to save men in His mercy. All men would end up in hell if it wasn't for the mercy of God. Hell is perfectly just. Where God's mercy comes in is that some men are saved.

**23And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,  
24even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.**

God does this so that He can make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy, which He prepared and ordained beforehand for glory. These vessels are believers who are both Jews and Gentiles.

**25As He says also in Hosea,  
"I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,'  
AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'"  
26"AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO  
THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,'  
THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."**

Hosea prophesies clearly that those who had not been chosen as the people of God would be given the opportunity to become the people of God, being called beloved of God. God would extend His grace and mercy beyond Israel to the Gentiles. This was His sovereign plan all along.

**27Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS  
OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT  
WILL BE SAVED;  
28FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH,  
THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."**



Isaiah makes it clear that though Israel had become a mighty nation on the earth consisting of multitudes of people, it is only a remnant that would be saved. Most of Israel rejected Christ and thus the Lord must judge even His own Jewish people who reject Him. He will save a remnant from the great tribulation or else they all would be killed (Zechariah 8).

**29And just as Isaiah foretold,  
"UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOth HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY,  
WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE  
RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."**

Isaiah explains that unless God has mercifully left Israel a remnant of the faithful, they would have resembled the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven. Even Israel who were God's chosen people, left to themselves needed the mercy of God, or they too would be destined for hell. Man is in a predicament because of sin. God must showcase His glory and love through Christ and in calling some to be His children. He wishes that all would respond to Him, but He will not force a person to love Him. Even Paul himself, despite the dramatic intervention in his life, could have still rejected Christ. Any person's conversion is a result of the mercy of God working in their heart to give them the grace to respond in faith to the message of the gospel. All believers are testimonies to God's grace and mercy.

**30What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness,  
attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;  
31but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.**

The Gentiles found mercy, though not all of them, because they pursued righteousness which is attained by faith. Israel missed salvation by and large because they relied in their own morality and religious performance to make them righteous. They didn't respond in faith like their father Abraham did.

**32Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.  
They stumbled over the stumbling stone,  
33just as it is written,  
"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF  
OFFENSE,  
AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."**

Israel pursued a salvation by works and not by faith and thus stumbled over the stumbling stone of Christ. God put salvation right in their midst in Christ, a Jew, and yet they did not receive Him. His teaching caused them to be offended because they trusted in their adherence to the Law to save them. Christ showed them the true state of their hearts, and they didn't like it. Thus they had him killed on the cross. Yet all men are responsible for putting Him on the cross because of their sin. If a person then repents of their sin and believes in Him, unlike Israel, they will be saved and not disappointed.

## Romans 10

**1**Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.  
**2**For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.  
**3**For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

As Paul mentioned in the last chapter, he has a great burden that Israel will turn from their hardness of heart and embrace the Messiah. To that end he prays. The Jews had and still have a zeal for the things of God, but they are misled and following lies. They need to know God's righteousness through Christ rather than trying to attain to righteousness on their own apart from God. They must surrender themselves and admit their sinfulness, subjecting themselves to the intervention and provision of God through Christ.

**4**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The law must show people their own sinfulness and then their end will be to turn to Christ in faith. Yet the Jews deceived themselves into thinking that they were actually keeping the Law. This was utter pride and self-righteousness. They loved the Law more than their God. They would not receive mercy.

**5**For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.

**6**But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down),  
**7**or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."

Man is notorious for trying to attain to their own righteousness, yet the person who relies upon keeping rules will be judged by their own performance. This inevitably will condemn them because no one fulfills all of the requirements of the Law. They try to bring God down to their level by reducing what true holiness and perfection is. They assume God will judge them on a lesser level. Others say that God would never send a person to hell because Christ will be merciful because of His love. They expect His love to undo His justice. This will not happen. Those who rely upon religious performance and self-righteousness by doing good works will be disappointed. Christ has set the standard high and God will enforce it. He will not have mercy on anyone who rejects the provision of His Son whom He loves.

**8**But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"--that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,  
**9**that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

**10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

Deuteronomy 30:14 shows that salvation is of the inner man. It is something that proceeds out of the mouth and is a reality in the heart because of an inward faith. The saving truth of God's Word is accomplished through faith in it. A person must confess verbally that Jesus is Lord, submitting thus to His authority in repentance from sin. He must also believe in his heart that He died for sin and was raised from the dead. The profession and inward belief according to the Word of God is what saves a person. It is impossible to have an inner belief of salvation without being willing to make an outward profession of faith. Yet many make outward professions and have no inward possession of faith. The heart and the mouth both play a role in salvation, and only God sees the true state of the heart.

**11For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."**

**12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;**

**13for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."**

God gives an open invitation to mankind, calling them to respond in faith. If they do, they will not be disappointed, particularly when they face God on judgment day. God is not partial to Jew or Gentile, extending grace to the entire world. He is Lord of all, not just of the Jew. He abounds in riches of grace and mercy, willing to save whoever will call upon His name. It is not as if He doesn't have enough mercy to go around. The issue is that man is stubborn and unwilling to repent, choosing to love the things of this world rather than God who made the world.

**14How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?**

**15How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"**

God has ordained a method and sequence for how the kingdom grows, the gospel is shared, and the truth is propagated. First of all let us note that the message we bring is good news of good things. When men understand that they are sinners, they are able to recognize the gospel for what it really is- good news. The gospel is a demonstration that the God of the universe that they have rejected still loves them and demonstrated His love by sending His own Son to die for their sins on the cross. It really is a beautiful thing. Yet how will anyone hear this message unless they are first sent. They must be sent out from the body of Christ. In one sense we are all commissioned by Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). In a practical sense however, each local body of believers ought to be training and sending out evangelists into the community and preparing missionaries for the world.

Those sent must preach the good news. Preaching is God's chosen means for sharing. The Greek word "kerusso" implies a public proclamation and heralding of the truth with a certain gravity and authority. This doesn't mean that we have to go to the street corner and shout at people, though some may be called to preach in such a manner. The issue is that we are bold in our witness, approaching others and not waiting for them to come to us, and that we understand that we have the most important message of all. Like a king's messenger, we had better get the message out to all the world. Preaching is not a mere conversation and sharing of opinions with one another. It is saying that the gospel is the truth and the world must receive it or else. There is an imperative element with preaching. Yet there is no need to cause any unneeded offense; the gospel will likely do all of that for us. We should be as gracious and loving as we can. Some preachers seem to hate the lost, which is not God's attitude at all. We must love them to such a degree that they are drawn to the truth of the message of the gospel. No person will ever believe unless they hear the message of God from a herald, and no one will herald unless they are sent.

**16However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"**

Israel had heard the message of God over and over again. Christ was even born to live and walk in their midst. Yet they rejected both the prophets God sent as well as His own Son. They heard the good news but they did not heed it. Saving faith responds in repentance to the truth. Yet the task of the believer is to be faithful in sharing the message. We cannot control the response of the hearer; we just need to make sure that they hear.

**17So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**

No one can be saved merely from observing good deeds and actions. God has spoken to us in these later days through His Son, and people must hear the gospel of Christ which is the Word of Christ in order to be saved. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Good works, holiness, love, unity, and hope (among other fruit of the Spirit) are necessary to maintain a pure testimony before the lost and open their eyes to the truth. Yet saving faith is never generated simply by watching the good works of others. The unsaved can only respond in faith to a message. Our actions incarnate the message of Christ which casts a fragrance of life or death into the air, but ultimately the issue is propositional truth and a response to it. This is why we, like the early church, must be active in evangelism in addition to our good deeds. It is said of the early church that there was almost never a conversation that went by without a Christian sharing the gospel. May it be like that in our day.

**18But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."**

Concerning Israel, they have indeed heard. The Word of God through the Law and the prophets was sufficient for their salvation, yet they did not listen.

**19But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says,  
"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION,  
BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."**

**20And Isaiah is very bold and says,  
"I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,  
I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."**

**21But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT  
MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."**

God has worked further mercy out of Israel's stubbornness and refusal to receive the gospel. The gospel went to the Gentiles because of God's doing and mercy, not because of their begging for it to come to them. They didn't ask to be the people of God, but God went to them. We can't expect people to pound the front doors of our homes and churches down to hear the gospel. We must take it to them and pray for God to call them to salvation in His great mercy. Israel had indeed been angered by the message that they had rejected God despite their adequate knowledge of how to respond to Him in faith. They despise the fact that the "unclean" Gentiles can be the people of God. Thus, they reject and hate Christ as the Messiah, not caring for the message He came to preach. Yet the hardness of the heart of Israel is salvation for the Gentiles.

## **Romans 11**

**1I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.**

**2God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?**

**3"Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN  
DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING  
MY LIFE."**

**4But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN  
THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL."**

**5In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.**

The question then at hand is whether or not God will reject Israel forever. In other words, did the church replace Israel in terms of God's promise of restoring Israel and in preserving a remnant of them, or will God still do that for Israel? Paul is emphatic that God has not rejected His people. They have rejected Him, but He will keep His unilateral promise to them. His promise to them to eventually write the law on their hearts will still happen. He will replace their hearts of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19). Yet even in the present time, some of the faithfulness of God to Israel is already realized in that some Israelites have responded already to the gospel of Christ. Paul gives himself as an example of a Jewish believer. So his life is evidence of God's faithfulness to Israel.

God foreknew that Israel would be His people, and He will see to it that one day in the future they as a people will be His once again. Elijah felt after his showdown with the prophets of Baal that there was no one in Israel who was faithful, when indeed there was. He felt that God had given up on Israel completely, when indeed He had not. God responded to him that there were still seven thousand men in Israel who had not given in to Baal worship. Seven thousand is a lot more than none. God did preserve a remnant of those who were faithful, even at the end of the Old Testament in the time of Malachi's ministry. In the same way (as is true even in our day) there is a faithful remnant of Jews who are believers in Christ as the Messiah. God has not cast off His people, but He has merely expanded who can be His people.

**6But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.**

This major theme of the epistle is again reiterated stating that salvation is by grace through faith. If it was by works, then grace would not be grace. One cannot earn a free gift. It can only simply be received. Such is our salvation, and such is the way that the remnant is saved.

**7What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;**

**8just as it is written,**

**"GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,  
EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,  
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."**

**9And David says,**

**"LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP,  
AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.**

**10"LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT,  
AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."**

What Israel has sought through keeping the Law and the outward rites they have not obtained for they did not respond in faith. Only the chosen of God obtained it while they rest were hardened. The Divine Potter has made some vessels for honor and others for dishonor, yet at the same time men are free to choose to respond to God in faith. God doesn't force anybody to go to hell, though He knows beforehand who will respond in faith and who will not. Israel has been given a spirit of stupor even in Paul's time and even in our day. They can't see or hear the truth because God by and large has hardened their hearts for a time so that the gospel can be taken to the rest of the world. Yet God in His mercy will eventually deal with Israel once again.

**11I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.**

**12Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!**

Israel is not so far gone that God will never restore them again. God has not cast Israel off forever. There is a great difference between stumbling and falling. Stumbling means that one can regain his balance. Falling means that the damage has been done. Israel has merely stumbled in the divine scheme of things. God is still working on Israel, trying to get them to come back to Him. Their hardness of hearts has enabled salvation to come to the Gentiles not simply because God loves the Gentiles but also because God is still trying to get the Jews to respond to Him. By sending the gospel to the Gentiles, God is making the Jews jealous. This is a means of God for trying to get the Jews to turn back to the one true God. So even the hardening of Israel has served to get the gospel to the ends of the world. How much more wonderful and beautiful will it be when Israel itself responds to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**13But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,**

**14if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.**

**15For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?**

Paul, speaking to Gentiles specifically at this point, magnifies his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. This is because if he is effective in calling Gentile sinners to repentance, it will make Israel all the more jealous and eager to respond to the gospel as well. Thus, he views his ministry as utterly important because there is a secondary element to the evangelization of the Gentiles in that ultimately it is part of God's plan in calling the Jews back to Himself. Israel's rejection of Christ served as a means of reconciliation to the rest of the world by the gospel going to the Gentiles. It will be even greater when they themselves respond to God. It will give them eternal life just as God already has to the Gentiles.

**16If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.**

**17But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree,**

**18do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.**

In the system of offerings to God, the firstfruits of the dough was given to God. This setting apart of the first and best part to God meant that the rest of the dough was also consecrated to God. In the same way, Christ was the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:23) of all of those who would inherit heaven and be adopted as sons of God. He is our only means of being grafted into God's family as God's people with the righteousness to stand in God's presence. He is our Root (Romans 15:12), and if we are in Him, then we as the branches (John 15) are holy also. Our only hope is being grafted into His vine and root. Since Christ is holy as the firstfruits, we too are holy as we are the rest of the lump of dough, all those who believe in His name. Our belief in Him allows us to be grafted in as

branches. Some of the branches had been broken off because of rebellion and stubbornness on the part of Israel, which is metaphorically speaking the natural olive tree. The Gentile believers are those who are metaphorically the wild olive tree. They by the mercy of God are grafted in among the natural branches and become partakers with them of the same rich root of Christ. Since we as Gentile believers are grafted in, we must be careful to not become arrogant, thinking that the Gentile church is the main attraction in the overall scheme of God. We are mere beneficiaries of the hardness of heart of Israel. Israel is the main event. God is not finished with them yet. Thus we are not to be disdainful of the branches, but honoring God's people, the Jews, though in many cases we need to witness to them of the gospel. We, as the branches, do not support Christ, but Christ supports us by giving us His righteousness. The branches need the root. Thus, since God has chosen Israel, we must remember that He will keep His promises to them to restore them one day.

**19**You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."  
**20**Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;  
**21**for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.

It is right for the believers of our day and of Paul's day to say that Israel's stubbornness caused them to be temporarily cast aside so that we could be grafted in as the people of God. They were cast off because of a lack of faith whereas we stand upon faith in Christ as our salvation. Since we are saved by grace through faith, we must not be arrogant and conceited. Rather, we are to fear since God will not spare the Gentiles anymore than the Jews if they harden their hearts against God and do not receive Christ in faith. The Gentiles may mock Israel for being so foolish but they themselves will be judged in the same way if they, too, reject the Messiah.

**22**Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Here we see two sides of God. God pours out justice and wrath upon those who reject Him. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," says Hebrews 10:31. Yet for those who respond to his kindness, there is grace and perfect love. Speaking then to the Gentiles as a whole, if they continue in God's kindness in responding to Him in faith, then God will continue to pour out grace and mercy upon them. However, if they, like Israel, harden their hearts against God and do not receive the gospel any longer, then they too will be cut off. Indeed this is what will happen when Christ returns and establishes the millennial kingdom, calling Israel back to Himself and punishing the Gentiles for their unrighteousness.

**23**And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.



Speaking then of Israel, if they do not continue in unbelief, God is able to graft them in again just as He grafted the Gentiles in. God gives Israel room to repent if they choose.

**24For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?**

After all, it is much more natural for the natural olive branch to be put into the natural olive tree than a wild olive branch. It is humbling as Gentile believers to admit that we are wild olive branches and not the natural branches, but we must do this and give Israel their rightful place and honor.

**25For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;**

Part of God's mysterious and sovereign plan is that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. In other words, Christ will not return until the gospel has been preached to the ends of the earth so that all the Gentiles can respond in faith. Thus, there will be people of every tongue, tribe, and nation in heaven. We need to remember that Israel is still the main event and that we are mere beneficiaries of God's mercy in His divine plan as He deals with Israel (and us as Gentiles) with great patience.

**26and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,  
"THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,  
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."  
27"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,  
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."**

All Israel will be saved according to God. This is essential for interpreting prophecy. God has not cast off His people forever. Christ will come as the Deliverer from Zion. Just before Israel is destroyed, Christ will come down to the Mount of Olives, and preserve a remnant of His people (Zechariah 14). He will remove their ungodliness and give them a heart that loves Him and receives Him for Who He is. Salvation is always by the mercy of God, and this will be no exception. God has made this promise to them regardless of their heart at the time: He will take away their sins and give them a new heart.

**28From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;  
29for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

From the perspective of the gospel, Israel is at enmity with God and thus with the church of God. They must be preached to with the good news of Christ. Yet from God's perspective they are beloved because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which

God will not forget. God's promises, calling, and gifts, when made unilaterally, are irrevocable because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). For example, God will complete the good work that He began in us no matter what. That is unilateral. Such a gift of God in salvation and subsequent glorification is irrevocable as is His call to receive Him in faith. God has made similar promises to Israel to give them a new heart, and He will do that.

**30For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,**

**31so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.**

**32For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.**

We as Christians must remember that we were once disobedient to God also, being born in sin. Yet God showed us mercy because of Israel's disobedience. Their disobedience has led to God showing us mercy so that ultimately they too will be shown mercy. The story doesn't end with the church. It finishes with God restoring Israel in His great mercy. All men by nature fall short of God's glory and are mired in disobedience. It is only the mercy of God that allows any person to respond in faith and be saved. Yet the key is that just as all have been shut up in disobedience, helpless to save themselves, God has shown mercy to all in sending Christ to die on their behalf. Yet the question remains: will they respond in faith to the mercy available to them? Some will and some will not.

**33Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!**

**34For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?**

**35Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?**

**36For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things To Him be the glory forever. Amen.**

When we get a glimpse into the divine plan and especially the mercy of God, we must simply stop and marvel as Paul does here. That God has all of these things planned out before the foundation of the world is mindboggling. That He would use human vessels like Paul and us to do His work is amazing. The depth of the riches and knowledge of God are unsearchable. How much grace and mercy He gives and how much understanding He has. His ways are so far above us that there is no way that we can understand fully how He makes decisions and goes about what He does. That is why He is God and we are not. None of us can tell God what to do or how to change His plans as if we are His counselor and know better than He does. God doesn't need anybody or owe anybody anything since He is self-sufficient. He is in debt to no man, for everything is His. All things have been created by Him through the word of His power for the glory of His name. The ultimate centerpiece of all of time and space is God Himself. God is writing this masterpiece of the story of human existence for His own glory and to demonstrate His glory to man so that man will glorify Him in return. Thus Paul rightly gives Him the glory that is due Him, which is forever. May it be so.

## Romans 12

**1Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

Therefore in light of the mercy of God shown to us in calling us to be His own, we need to give Him the glory that He desires in presenting our bodies, which are temples of God (1 Corinthians 6:19), as living and holy sacrifices of God. God doesn't want mere lip service and external ritual; He wants our hearts. This alone is our spiritual service as priests of God in worship. We don't sacrifice lambs and goats, but we rather give God our hearts which are to be holy and obedient to Him.

**2And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

Though we were once of the world, we are no longer to be conformed to its ways. We are rather to be transformed by the work of Christ in us so that our mind is renewed to think as He thinks and to desire what He desires. There is to be an ongoing sanctification process in the life of the believer. We must yield to His merciful work in our lives. This is why the verb form is passive, saying that we are to let God do this work. It is something accomplished as we rest in His faithfulness and believe His Word. Then, and only then, will we demonstrate by our lives what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. Never ought there to be a doubt that the will of God is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

**3For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**

Since any holiness that is manifested in our lives is a work of God's grace in our lives through faith, there is no reason to boast in any righteousness that we have as if it is from ourselves. Rather, we ought to let God be the judge of our hearts and think with sound judgment. God has allotted to each believer a measure of faith. Ranking individual gifts is foolish because all gifts are different. God has made us individually for individual purposes. Thus God will judge us each on the basis of how we use the gifts He has allotted for us. (see also 1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

**4For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,**

**5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**

Just as there are many members in our human bodies (eyes, ears, noses, arms, legs, etc.) and just as each has its own special and particularly important function, so too does the body of Christ. Each person has gifts that God has allotted to them individually. We, since we are all part of Christ's body, are one. Though we all are particular parts of the body, we, like our natural body, are still one whole body.

**6Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;**

Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift. We must note that too often Christians get into the ranking of gifts, saying that one is better than another. In our culture, leading and teaching are the gifts to desire (or envy) because we are prone to think that position and leadership are better than other things like hospitality and serving. God doesn't see it that way. Otherwise He would have gifted everybody with those gifts. However, those who have those gifts have a greater stewardship and will be held with greater accountability (James 3:1). God has graciously gifted each person as He sees fit, and they must accept how God has called them and wired them. The Potter has made each clay vessel for a reason and a purpose, and only when it operates according to its divine design does the body benefit and the clay itself find fullness of joy. It is no good for us to have spiritual gifts and then not use them. God has gifted us for the work of the kingdom and for serving others. Most of us will do all of the ministries set out by Paul, even if we are not gifted in them. The goal would be, however, to harvest the gifts that we are given so that we serve in the proper place.

The gift of prophecy is no longer needed since its purpose was to speak forth divine revelation and to exhort by way of revealing mysteries and hidden knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:2). The word for prophesy is "propheteuo," which is more than merely speaking forth the word of God by preaching and teaching. Thus, Ephesians 4:11 differentiates the gifts. Prophecy was a gift of the Holy Spirit operative in the early church for the purpose of giving the needed instruction for the church prior to the completion of the canon of Scripture. Those who used this gift needed to be full of faith so that they would be filled with the Spirit in order to be able to speak accurately and boldly the revelation and instruction from God. The church was built on this faithful teaching of the apostles and prophets, but now we have the written Word to continue building upon their foundation (Ephesians 2:19-20, Ephesians 3:5). Christ has spoken finally and definitely through His Word by way of these early New Testament apostles and prophets (Hebrews 1:1-2). Prophecy will be reactivated once at the time of Christ's second coming (Joel 2:28).

**7If service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;**

Deacons held a specific office of service, but service is also a gift, though all believers should serve in some capacity. The word for service implies ministering Christian affection through ways such as giving money, goods, time, or food. Some are gifted at preparing food, feeding the hungry, supplying medical treatment to those in need, and so on. These are examples of works of service. There are those who are great at doing what

others ask of them to do on behalf of the church, community, or anyone else. Those who serve will be great in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:35). Service should also be done in proportion to the faith that we have in Christ.

The gift of teaching is for the purpose of instructing in right doctrine and in the precepts of God. Those who are gifted to teach are able to rightly explain and expound upon God's truths. They are able to use the spoken word or written word to be able to train and instruct others in the way of truth. Teachers, too, teach by faith in Christ.

**8** **or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**

To exhort is to admonish, strengthen, encourage, call to action, console, and persuade. Exhortation includes instruction and teaching, but it adds the component of stirring speech that moves one to act. Teaching is more informative while exhortation is more persuasive, though both teach the Word of God. This ministry is to be done according to the faith given a person as well.

Giving is a gift which is to be exercised with liberality, generosity, freedom, and cheerfulness. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving is certainly applied to finances, though time, energy, and other resources could be included. Proper giving has no ulterior motive, and its intentions are forthright and honest.

Those who are gifted in leading are to do so with all diligence, earnestness, devotion, and commitment. A lazy, uninspired leader will create like followers. Thus, the leader is responsible to actively use his or her gift to set the pace for others and show them the proper direction. Elders must shepherd the flock with eagerness (1 Peter 5:7). Leaders cannot be slack or careless, but they must be purposeful and responsible.

Some are gifted in showing mercy, though again we all should be merciful in one way or another. To show mercy is to help one who is afflicted, suffering, or in need of help in some way. Those who are merciful go to the needy and brokenhearted and offer them the love of Christ and whatever earthly provision that they have to offer. Some are in need because of factors outside of their control. They need mercy to help them in their time of need. Others are suffering because of sin that they have committed. Still, they can be given mercy, though the sin issues need to be addressed at some point. To give somebody good when they deserve evil is a manifestation of the gift of mercy.

**9** **Let love be without hypocrisy Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.**

Love is to be free from ulterior motives, pure, and sincere. Exterior niceness with a judgmental or hateful attitude on the inside is a violation of our call as believers. We must really care and be concerned about the well-being of others, regardless of what it might cost us or whom it might not impress. To abhor evil is to dislike it and to have a horror of it. It is to be dismayed at wrongdoing and to have no joy when evil is committed (1 Corinthians 13:6). The word for cling means to glue together, and it is the

same word for describing a man being joined to his wife. This is an unbreakable, tightly knit union that must be guarded carefully. We must love what is good, rejoice in the truth, and hold fast to all that is pure, upright, and noble (Philippians 4:8). We should let good permeate our thoughts, what we do, and what we say.

**10Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;**

The devotion that Paul is getting at is the tender warmth, love, and affection that comes in an accepting and caring family. In such a place, we have no fear, we are secure, and we know that others will do what is best for us.

**11not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**

Sometimes it is easy to become lazy or slack in our relationship with the Lord. Paul is calling believers to be passionate, fervent, committed, and heartfelt when it comes to the things of the Lord. We need to be diligent to carry out our calling as witnesses of Christ so that we take advantage of every opportunity to do good (Galatians 6:10).

**12rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,**

We are not to be those who grow weary in doing good or who become dismayed because of moral decay or evil around us. We are rather to be firm in our hope that Jesus has power over our circumstances, that He can change them if He wills, and that He will come back and establish peace on the earth. We have much to look forward to as believers which should keep our hope strong. In fact, our hope should be so obvious even when we are under trial or persecution that others have to ask how we do it (1 Peter 3:14-15). When tribulation comes, we are to stand fast, honoring Christ, knowing that Christ has overcome this world (John 16:33). If we resist sin and continue serving Christ despite difficulty and temptation, we will grow in perseverance and character (James 1:2-4). Paul wants us to stay committed to prayer. 1 Peter 4:7 reminds us that the reason we are to stay steadfast and persevere is for the purpose of prayer. Prayer is highly effective from a righteous, believing heart that prays according to the will of God (James 5:16). Prayer is a way that we can serve the Lord even if circumstances prevent us from doing other means of service. Christians must come to the place where we devote ourselves to prayer because we know and believe that we need it. Until we see that we must pray and that prayer multiplies our labor, we will fail miserably in it.

**13contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.**

The early church was excellent at holding possessions lightly, knowing that God was the owner of all ultimately. Those who had an abundance were to give to those who lacked so that all evened out (2 Corinthians 8:14). This was a very visible testimony of brotherly love and of the family of God. The reality is that saints will have needs, even though God promises to supply all of them (Philippians 4:19). The point is that we as believers can act as the vehicles of God's provision. We are not to give judgmentally or

expecting something in return. We are to give freely because we want to. We may even need to open our homes at times to give people a roof over their heads or a warm meal. Hospitality is almost to be synonymous with the church experience.

**14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.**

We will be persecuted and reviled (1 Timothy 3:12). It will happen, and when it does we are to rejoice, knowing that such is an honor. Persecution is intimate fellowship with our Lord (Philippians 3:10). We are to not hate, curse, insult, malign, or condemn those who insult us. They want to provoke us, and God tells us that love is not easily provoked (1 Corinthians 13:5). Jesus did not fight back when He was persecuted (1 Peter 2:23). What we are to do is forgive those who wrong us and let God be the One Who avenges our cause (see v. 19). We can be sure that He will execute justice, though it may not be until eternity.

**15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.**

**16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

Being of the same mind with one another implies that we are growing in the truth according to the Word of God. Truth is the foundation of true unity. Secondly, we are to be those who truly love one another, for love is the “perfect bond of unity” (Colossians 3:4). Thus we are to think Biblically and love Biblically, sympathizing and empathizing with others as they experience the goods and bads of life. There will be times of sorrow and times of celebration. We need to not envy or become jealous when others are blessed, but we need to praise God for blessing them. When others suffer, we need to not judge them but pray for them. Thirdly, we cannot rank one another in an unrighteous attitude of comparison and classification. As 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’” If we do live this way, true fellowship and family in the church can never happen as we parcel ourselves only into groups that we would feel most comfortable with. We need to associate with the poor and the rich, the old and the young, the male and female, and the successful and not so successful. We must be impartial about our associations, loving all people, for God is the impartial Judge (1 Peter 1:17). God hates haughty eyes which look on others with scorn or contempt (Psalm 101:5). It is easy to think that we are better than others and fall for the trap of being self-consumed even though we may be in a position of service. The only evaluation of us that will matter is God’s. Our focus should not be self but others and God.

**17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.**

**18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**

**19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.**

**20" BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."**

**21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

If we decide to retaliate against those who persecute us for the sake of Christ or against those who are just mean and nasty in general, we let ourselves be overcome by evil. The only way to overcome evil is through good. Force cannot change a person's heart and mind, though it may alter their behavior. Doing something good for them might transform them from the inside out (Matthew 5:16). Christianity needs to be known by the marks that Christ gave us whereby we are to be identified, namely love (John 13:34-35), unity (John 17:21), holiness (Hebrews 12:14), hope (1 Peter 3:15), and good works (Matthew 5:16). We are not a passive religion, but a people of God who are committed to loving others whether they deserve it or not. We are not to sit back and wait for them to figure things out or to repent, but we are to go to them with loving deeds, words, and a message of hope. We know we are not to take revenge, for God will avenge His own. If God is really sovereign, then His own can expect Him to take up their cause, whether now or later. When we take measures into our own hands in terms of returning evil for evil, we make it appear as though God is dead. We need to leave room for the wrath of God. There will be people who disturb the peace, but we must do our part to keep it by being those who do not provoke, who do not seek a fight, and who do not retaliate. Rather, we need to aggressively, though not maliciously, do good deeds to those who make our lives miserable and disturb the peace.

The Christian looks to find where the ungodly, even those who have mocked us for our faith, have needs. If they need food, we are to offer them food. If they need a drink, we need to offer them a drink. If they need some other kind of help, we should offer that as well. In a society that is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity, Christians need to seek out needs and meet them, demonstrating good for those who hate us and our God. God will deal with those who reject us and Him. Our job is simply to go to those who hate us and minister love to them (Luke 6:27). Our good will reveal their evil in such a way that light shines into the darkness (John 1:5). They may not understand what we are doing or why, but our pursuit of love, peace, and good works enables the Spirit to work on their conscience. This heaps fiery coals on their head and earns us a reward (Proverbs 25:21-22). In ancient Egypt, people would walk about with a pan of burning coals on their head to show shame, guilt, and contrition. Our fleshly response to hate is to insult back. Our spiritual response is to love back. This is God's will for His purpose is to redeem the one who did the hating. Only love and grace can show a person his own sin and bring him to repentance. God's kindness manifested through our good works can lead to their repentance (Romans 2:4).

### **Romans 13**

**1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.**



Being at peace with all men includes submitting to our governing authorities. God is sovereign over all authority. As Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” Any person in government is there because God has allowed that person to rule. All authorities which exist are ordained by God. They may not all be God-honoring authorities, but God is sovereign over their being where they are. He can bring them down if He wills, and He can lift another up if He so desires. Since God has put people in our lives over us, we honor Him when we submit to them. Obviously, we are not to deny Christ if they tell us to deny Him or to disobey Him in anyway. Though earthly authorities are ordained by God, God is the ultimate authority. Thus, His will and glory takes precedent over what any earthly authority might do or say.

**2Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.**

David of the Old Testament modeled the principle of honoring God’s appointed authorities. He had many opportunities to kill King Saul and take the kingdom from him, but he waited until God took the kingdom from Saul. God desires us to submit to authorities, and if we do not and become rebellious and unruly, we will bring judgment upon ourselves. We don’t have to agree with our authorities or even like them, but we are to respect their governance. They are where they are because God allows them to be there. It may be a test, or it may be a judgment. But they are to be submitted to nonetheless. That we do this is a test of our willingness to subject ourselves to the work, power, and plans of God. He alone can bring a person down or raise a new one up.

**3For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.**

**5Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.**

**6For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.**

**7Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.**

Christians may be citizens of heaven, but in the here and now we need to live and function as citizens of this world. We benefit from the protection and provision of government, and thus we should give government its due. We need to pay tax where tax is due and any other customs. Those who should be feared because of their authority should be feared, and those who need to be honored as authorities should be honored. They are not to be worshipped or followed if it will force us to sin against God. But, otherwise, we should rightly submit. Since rulers are ultimately servants of God in that they are doing the sovereign will of God whether they know it or not and whether they like it or not, we should give them their due as unto the Lord. Generally speaking,

government does not seek to destroy those who do good and are good citizens. Government is more concerned with dealing with lawbreakers and criminals. Though, obviously there are exceptions to this generality, especially is a government is biased against Christianity. There are certainly ungodly forms of government and ungodly ways to lead. These will not necessarily keep a good Christian from being harmed.

We would be worse off if we professed Christ and committed crimes against society. Government will deal with the unruly and evil. They are thus in this place for the purpose of punishing those who do evil. Sometimes in history God will raise up a nation to pour out His wrath on other nations (i.e. Israel on the Canaanites- Genesis 15:16). We should thank God for good governments who defend human rights and provide freedom to worship God. Thus, since God uses governments to punish evil, we should submit to them as they can be an agent of His bidding. Furthermore, being subject to government is a matter of conscience in terms of keeping a good testimony before men. If Christians don't pay their taxes or take part in their government, they set a poor example as it demonstrates selfishness, self-righteousness, irresponsibility, and a lack of care for the welfare of others in the locale, state, and nation.

**8Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.**

**9For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."**

**10Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Part of being a good citizen is to do what we can to stay out of debt or other legal infringements. We don't want to have to pay society a debt in prison. Neither do we want to be enslaved to the lender (Proverbs 22:7). Thus, the ultimate law we should live by is the law of love. This is the only thing we should owe anyone, and we owe it because we are stewards of the kingdom of God. Thus, we have a duty before God to live as citizens of heaven while we are yet on earth. Our love for others is the culmination of the intention of the Law. Paul quotes several commandments relevant to proper functioning of a society. Murder, stealing, coveting, and adultery all lead to hurt, frustration, division, and destruction. They are not motivated by love but by envy, jealousy, and hate. Thus, what Christians should bring to society is a fulfillment of the law to love our neighbors as ourselves. Actually, Christ even called us to go a step further by loving as He loved (John 13:34-35), which was to give up Himself for others. This is the greatest form of love that we lay down our lives for others (John 15:13). Out of love for God, for conscience sake, and for the sake of subjecting ourselves to God-ordained authorities, we need to love our neighbors. Only a believer can truly love because love is of God. We must be born of God in order to love (1 John 4:7-8). Thus, we fulfill the law of Christ when we love, and we show that we have fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Law in and through Christ Who now enables us to love.

**11Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.**

**12The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

**13Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.**

**14But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.**

We have but a brief time on this earth. Thus, to sleep during our time of stewardship is to give into our flesh and behave improperly, ruining our testimony and losing our rewards. We are not to be like those who commit sexual immorality, who lust, who get drunk, who speak profanely, and who are constantly at odds with one another, envying one another. We have God Who gives us what we need so that we don't have to be constantly in strife and jealousy (James 4:2-3).

Our day of salvation from this earthly body draws ever nearer. One day our salvation will be declared to all as we enter into Christ's kingdom as His sons or daughters (1 Peter 1:5). We are to put on Christ and the armor of light. As Paul instructed the church in Ephesians 6, the way to spiritual victory is by remembering who we are in Christ and trusting Christ for the victory over Satan. If we lose faith and lower our shield, if we doubt our salvation and remove our helmet, if we get deceived and remove our belt of truth, if we become lazy and cease preparing our feet with the gospel of peace, if we let sin reside in our heart by removing our breastplate of righteousness, or if we don't know the Word and are unable to use the sword of the Spirit, we are making provision for the flesh. God doesn't tempt us; Satan does (James 1:13). Satan appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). If he can get us to bite on any of these baits, then he will have us. As James 1:14 says, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." Thus, Paul's message is to be pursuing God, actively serving Him, and not putting ourselves in danger areas where compromise is possible and temptation is enabled. Our time is short, so we must lay aside the deeds of darkness, live as if we are in the light, and press on toward the prize (Philippians 3:14), running to win (1 Corinthians 9:24).

## **Romans 14**

**1Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.**

**2One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.**

This chapter shows us how to behave in matters pertaining to Christian conscience. Some of us are weak in faith, meaning that we are easily stumbled into sin because we can't do something and not break faith with the Lord. This is not a necessarily a position of inferiority or immaturity, though it may indicate a lack of Biblical understanding. It is contrasted with that of a person "stronger" in faith, meaning that such a person is able to

do something without it harming their walk with God. Those who are weak must be accepted and not judged for being pious, legalistic, or overly spiritual. They must follow their conscience and only act by faith. Their convictions should be welcomed, and their opinion should not be quarreled over. Sometimes those who are strong like to provoke the weak to sin or argue with them about their strict position on a matter as if they are more spiritual. This is strictly forbidden by Paul. We should not mock or challenge those who have decided by faith before God to abstain from something that they fear would cause them to stumble. In this example, some could eat meat while others only would eat vegetables because they had a problem in their consciences with eating meat that may have been sacrificed to idols (see also 1 Corinthians 10:27-33). The weak Jewish believers had trouble letting go of some of the ceremonial expectations from their heritage in Judaism while the Gentile believers didn't want to return to the paganism that they had just repented from, let alone confuse the unsaved who were watching them.

**3The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.**

Paul reminds the strong to not despise the weak for their abstinence, and he reminds the weak to keep from judging or looking down on those who do eat, as if they must be sinning. God accepts the strong person's position as well as the weak person's stand. Both do well as they follow the Spirit's leading for their lives. There was nothing wrong with the Jewish believers still observing the Passover, for example. It wasn't a sin issue, though Paul would have said that what they did was unnecessary, for it was only a shadow of Christ Who had now come. The Gentile believers could have eaten the meat sacrificed to idols as idols are dead anyway. But some who were weaker in faith could have been troubled by keeping the connection with their pagan past; thus, they did good to abstain from eating meat. The key was that those who ate and those who did not didn't judge or mock one another or push one another to go against their conscience, stumbling them into sinning.

**4Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

We are not to oversee the decisions of others pertaining to matters of faith and conscience. God is their judge as He is ours. We are each responsible for our decisions before Him. The Lord will give us grace to do what is right and give us the direction that we need to make proper decisions.

**5One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.**

**6He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.**

Some Jews still wanted to observe the feasts and ceremonies of the past. Thus, certain days were more important for them than others. To another, particularly for Gentile

believers, these were things of the past. The Gentiles could have been tempted to scorn those among the Jewish believers who felt compelled before God to still observe these days. These same Jews could have been tempted to judge the Gentiles for being liberal and indulging in sin. Yet Paul's command is to do everything as to the Lord being concerned about the state of our own hearts. We must come to a place where we decide with certainty as to what the will of God is for us in the matter, and we must do it, thereby glorifying God. To disobey the Spirit's leading or to go against our conscience is to sin. If we can do it from faith, we should do it to God's glory. If we cannot, we had better not, lest we sin. Again, never does this argument allow for sin that is clearly condemned in Scripture. We can never be so "strong" that we can disobey God.

**7For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;**

**8for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**

**9For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.**

Though we must each make our own decisions, we don't live for ourselves. We are to deny ourselves, and we are live for God's will and purposes. Whether we live or die, it is to be for the Lord. At all times, dead or alive, we will be His. This is the victory that Christ owns in that He has conquered sin and death. He is thus Lord of all, over both the dead and the living. He will also judge all, so we should leave the judgment to Him.

**10But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.**

**11For it is written,**

**"AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,  
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."**

**12So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.**

We will not give an account to Christ for our brother or sister but for our own choices while in the body. This is why we should not judge our brothers for being too stingy or look down on them for doing something that we might not be comfortable doing. They will have to defend their position to God, and so will we. We will all be judged by Christ and be rewarded according to how we lived in while in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10).

**13Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.**

Rather than trying to take Christ's job and judge others, we should rather be thinking of others as more important than ourselves. Thus, we should determine to not do something if it is going to cause the other to be tempted to go against his convictions. Thus, the person who is strong in a matter might need to limit his actions for the sake of not unduly causing a brother who is weaker to stumble into sin.

**14I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**

Paul knew that all things were clean before God, though the Jews still viewed some animals as being unclean. For those who still thought that there were unclean animals, if they were to eat them, they would sin. Since they thought they were unclean and believed that they would sin to violate this conviction, if they did choose to violate it, they would sin. Thus they did right to abstain, even though technically it wasn't necessary.

**15For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.**

Those who are strong in a matter should not hurt their brother by offending him and making him uneasy and uncomfortable. If a brother is stumbled, this then violates the law of love because we have made ourselves to be more important than others. We are not to endanger or run roughshod over a brother who is loved by God so much that Christ died for him. The welfare of our brother is to be so much more important than exercising our liberty before God. Thus, Paul would become as a Jew when with the Jews so as to not stumble them needlessly. Their salvation was more important than him making a point about the cleanliness of pigs. Salvation was of far greater importance than food, and salvation could come to the Jews even if they still kept some of the ceremonial customs. When he was with the Gentiles, he could eat the unclean meat without causing them harm. Thus, he would become all things to all people for the purpose of winning some (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

**16Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;**

If we find ourselves in the position where something is acceptable for us, it is thus a good thing for us. Yet, if we abuse our liberty in the matter so as to offend the party for whom it is not acceptable, then what is a good thing will be denounced as an evil thing.

**17for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

We will cause unnecessary division and hurt among brothers, and we will offend those who need the gospel for the sake of making a mere point about something to eat or drink. The kingdom of God is what is important and whether or not a person is in the kingdom, regardless of whether or not they eat meat or vegetables. The kingdom consists of those who love one another despite issues of faith and liberty in the Spirit. The kingdom is about being made righteous before God, finding true peace, living peaceably with others as we can, and having joy unspeakable from the Holy Spirit. These are the issues, and their centrality must be honored.

**18For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

**19**So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Those who prefer the interests of others ahead of their own freedom serve Christ. This is acceptable to God, and approved by men in that it is common courtesy and respect for others. Exercising our freedom at the expense of our brother's conscience will cause strife and division. Thus, we are to do what we can to keep the peace and edify one another. We will not be able to encourage others in the Lord regarding matters pertaining to the kingdom if we have offended them or caused them to sin by our behavior at the dinner table.

**20**Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

It is never worth offending a brother in the Lord simply to prove a point that indeed God has given us liberty to do something that their conscience is telling them to refrain from. In this case, the meat was acceptable and the feasts didn't need to be kept, but those who were free to do these things were not to exercise their liberty at the cost of leading their brothers astray. Even though these things were clean for the strong, they would become evil if they exercised their liberty to eat the meat so as to offend their weaker brothers.

**21**It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

A guiding principle in determining issues pertaining to Christian liberty and conscience is that we don't do anything if it might cause our brothers to stumble. Thus, even though a person might have freedom in their conscience to eat certain things to do certain things, they may need to limit their freedom so that the main thing, the gospel, can be kept the main thing. There is no point in creating disunity among believers just so that we can indulge our liberty. Thus, the goal isn't to liberalize the church but to refrain from anything that might be a hint of immorality (Ephesians 5:3). This does not mean that we should create legalistic standards and watch over one another as judges to make sure that we are all keeping the rules, so to speak. It means that we should all walk before God according to His leading but never at the expense of a brother in the Lord.

**22**The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Our faith is individual, though stemming from an historic confession and body of doctrine. We each are led of the Spirit since we are sons of God (Romans 8:14). Thus, we need to follow His leading, not His leading of someone else. Thus, some decisions in the Christian life are personal. We shouldn't create absolute standards where the Bible does not give them. We each are to walk before God for ourselves knowing that God will judge us individually for what we do, depending upon whether it is of faith or of the flesh. But we must operate under conviction. If we have doubt about doing something because our conscience is not at peace, we need to not do it. If we are unsure if we are

doing wrong, we should not be doing what we are doing. If we want the joy of the Lord in our lives, we should follow the leading of the Spirit, exercising our freedom in Christ, only being mindful of times where we need to limit our freedom so that we don't stumble our brothers.

**23But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.**

Another guiding principle in matters pertaining to Christian liberty is that we must be able to do what we do with certainty that we are following the Spirit's leading and the will of God. We are not to waffle around in doubt, wondering if we are serving God or the flesh. If there is any doubt that what we are doing is not a result of faith, then we ought not to do it. If we violate our conscience or doubt the Spirit's leading and still eat, we will have sinned.

There are no absolute legalistic standards that should be drawn in the church. There are, however, principles that govern how our liberty in Christ should function. We must be sure that what we are doing is from faith and not of the flesh, we must not stumble one another, and we must do what we do with certainty that we are honoring God. There are times to limit our freedom and times not to. We must always seek the welfare of our brothers above our own liberty, and we must keep the emphasis on the gospel and the kingdom so that needless offenses don't impede their progress and growth.

## **Romans 15**

**1Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.**

There are those who are weak in strength because of an error arising from a weakness in the mind. Their faith is weak because of a lack of understanding of the purposes and will of God. Those who have understanding and are assured of their liberty in matters pertaining to Christian conscience must bear the weaknesses. It doesn't say to bear with the weaknesses as if to tolerate them, but it means to take upon the shoulders as to carry. Thus, as with taking up our cross, we deny ourselves, look out for the welfare of the weak, and carry them along by loving them despite their incomplete understanding and weak faith. We don't just please ourselves and force our ways upon them, for such would cause them to sin.

**2Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.**

Our goal as believers in Christ is not to be self-seeking but to be seeking the good of others for the purpose of helping them become more like Christ. We can't do this if we make them sin or violate their conscience. They need sound teaching at the right time, right place, and in the right way. They do not need to be forced to do something that they don't feel that they should.



**3For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."**

Referencing Psalm 69:9, Christ modeled preferring others ahead of Himself by letting those who would mock Him or question Him go right ahead and do it. He could have gone along with what would have looked good and drawn the least derision, but He chose to love the sinners and bear with the weak even though it cost Him His life.

**4For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

This is an important verse affirming the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. All that had been written that had been considered given by God was to be taken as that which was indeed given by God for the purpose of instructing us. Of course, we believe that Paul was inspired of God, thus showing us that the letters of the apostles were also inspired and able to instruct us. Not all that is recorded in the Old Testament is for the purpose of showing us how to do things, for many times the flaws of people are recorded which show us what not to do. Thus, we must read the Scripture and learn what God wants and does not want. Then we will be able to persevere in faith as we obey Him, knowing Who He is, how He works, and what He wants from us. There is also great encouragement to be found in the Scripture because we can see how God has been faithful to keep His promises. We see the mercy of God, the power of God, and the unfailing love of God. The Old Testament needs to be studied and known, not bypassed as lesser or inferior. It complements the New Testament and vice versa. The New Testament writers cite verses from the Old Testament over and over again, showing how Christ has fulfilled the Law and the prophets. If the apostles saw the importance of the Old Testament, so too should we. Yet a proper understanding of much that is in the Old Testament is only possible through the lens of Christ and the New Covenant.

**5Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,**

**6so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**7Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.**

Christ accepted us by calling us His children (John 1:12) and friends (John 15:15) and enabling us to house the glory of Christ in our hearts. Thus we are to accept other believers as family and friends showing them the kindness likened to family. This kindness is necessary for unity so that we can be of the same mind as the Son and the Father as one (John 17:21). If we do this, then we will be able to jointly glorify God with a corporate voice that is pleasing and honoring to God. God is not a God of strife and division by of love and unity. This unity can only happen through Christ and by the transformation of His Word according to right doctrine and truth. Unity is not a tolerance of error or sin. Unity is a gift of God because Paul says that it is granted to us by God. Thus, we must each live by faith, giving preference to one another in love, and growing in perseverance and encouragement according to the study and appropriation of the

Scriptures. We need the instruction of the Scriptures for our maturity, unity, and ability to glorify God individually and corporately. Thus, a misuse or minimization of the Bible will lead to division and destruction of the church.

**8For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,  
9and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,  
"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,  
AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."**

**10Again he says,  
"REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."**

**11And again,  
"PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES,  
AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."**

**12Again Isaiah says,  
"THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE,  
AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES,  
IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."**

God had promised blessing for the nations through Abraham. His promise to bring the praise of God even to the Gentile nations was fulfilled through Christ. Christ ministered to the Jews while He was on the earth, discipling twelve Jewish men who would be those who propagated the church. He did this for the sake of fulfilling God's promises in the Old Testament, particularly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in light of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3). He also did this so that the Gentiles would have hope of eternal life and be able to glorify God. Thus, as the Jews hardened their heart, the gospel went by the grace of God to the Gentiles. Christ clearly fulfilled all of the promises in the Old Testament about a descendent of the line of David being the One Who would give the Gentiles hope, joy, and the ability and desire to praise God.

**13Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Sometimes believers wonder why they lack all joy and peace. They may have some, but they are not experiencing the abundant life that God has promised (John 10:10). God is a God of hope, and He wants to fill us with all joy. But we will not experience this fullness unless we yield our lives to the filling of the Holy Spirit in faith. We must believe that God will do what He says He will do. If we put our faith completely in the promises of our Lord, we can expect to have an abundance of hope that will carry us through even the darkest of days. Our certainty stems from the fact that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), that God's promises stand the test of time, and that He has given us the Holy Spirit to indwell us.

**14And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.**

Paul speaks now directly to his readership telling them that he believes that they are full of goodness. They are new creations in Christ with new hearts, able to glorify God and house the perfect Holy Spirit of God. They are not infallible, for they still have flesh and can be deceived into living as if they are in the old self. But Paul believes that these believers are living victoriously, being controlled by the love of Christ, filled up with the goodness of God. They are walking in holiness as God is good. They are also filled with all knowledge, as we have all things pertaining to life and godliness in Christ (2 Peter 1:3). These believers have been taking in the Word of God so that they are growing to maturity, being ready and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). They know the Word well enough to be teachers of others and to correct others in the Lord when necessary. These are very high compliments from Paul.

The fact that these believers were godly, faithful, and maturing in Christ enabled Paul to plunge the depth of the issues that are addressed in this letter. If these believers had still been infants in Christ, as the writer of Hebrews encountered (Hebrews 5:11-13) with his readership, he would have had to limit what he was able to say, rather spending time correcting and rebuking, like Paul did with the Corinthians. Christians should come to the place where they can reason and apply Biblical truths to all areas of life. They should be able to ask the tough questions and provide answers.

**15But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,  
16to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

Paul did give a few rebukes here and there in this letter, but by and large he was able to instruct. These were simply reminders to them because of his calling by the grace of God to be a minister to the Gentiles. He had a burden to explain that the Gentiles indeed are grafted into the vine of Christ and should be accepted as such. He also spent time then dealing with how to handle the differences between the customs of Jewish believers and those of the Gentiles. As the Old Testament priests brought offerings before God, Paul, like a priest, was bringing the gospel to the Gentiles as His sacrifice and service to God. We, too, as believers are priests who are to live both as those who perform the sacrifices (1 Peter 2:9), offering the gospel of Christ, and being the offering by yielding our lives up to Christ and His call (Romans 12:1-2).

**17Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.**

**18For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,**

**19in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

Paul does not boast here in himself or in his own inherent goodness or ability but in Christ, in the gospel of Christ, in Christ working through Him, in Christ Who is his life, and in God's faithfulness to carry His gospel through Him to the Gentiles. Christ is His boast, and thus he only speaks of what Christ has accomplished through him by making the Gentiles obedient to Christ. They have obeyed in word, by confessing Christ as Lord and trusting in His sacrifice for sins, and in deed, repenting of their sin and obeying the commands of God. These are signs of true conversion and lasting, genuine change. Paul doesn't brag about numbers of converts, letters written, or dollars earned in the ministry, which for him was only what he made by making tents. He boasts in what God has done for the sake of His glory and for the kingdom. To boast in these things when we know that what God has accomplished through us is clear evidence of His power and not of our own sufficiency is not wrong. Affirming his apostolic authority along with the twelve disciples, Paul makes it clear that he saw signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit. He worked miracles and saw healings that were clearly supernatural. He had been faithful to preach to Jerusalem and well beyond to Illyricum, which is a region near Italy and Greece close to modern day Serbia.

**20And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation;**

**21but as it is written,**

**"THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE,  
AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."**

Paul's purpose in ministry, which was in line with God's call for him, was to preach the gospel where it had not been preached before, namely to the Gentiles. He didn't have others' foundations to build on. He had to take a message to those who had never heard before.

**22For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;**

**23but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you**

**24whenever I go to Spain--for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while--**

**25but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.**

Because of his travels abroad which clearly took most of his time, he had been unable to visit the church at Rome which he would have liked. Yet he viewed his mission completed in terms of taking the gospel to these regions, so he was hopeful that he would be able to fulfill his desire to stop by Rome and visit the Christians there. His plan was to stop by when he took a trip to Spain. He desired to be helped there by them, as he would need supplies, food, and housing along his journey. He would plan to spend some time there to fellowship. His present purpose was to go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints there.

**26For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.**

**27**Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

**28**Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

**29**I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

The Christians at Macedonia and Achaia (near Greece), had gladly given a donation to be distributed to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Those who are rich in the church need to look out for the welfare of those who are in need. The Macedonians and Achaians were glad to give to Jerusalem. Paul argues that since salvation is from the Jews in Jerusalem that the Gentiles who received this salvation should at least be willing to give back financially to Jerusalem. Eternal life far outweighs a financial donation to those in need, so it was no burden to them to give to the needy of those who had blessed them in such a way already. Paul was going to go ahead and send the money with the letter which had his seal. He would later meet up with the believers there en route to Spain.

**30**Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

**31**that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;

**32**so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

**33**Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul asks the believers to pray for him in the name of Christ and out of the love of the Spirit. He urges them to do this, asking them to strive with him in prayer on his behalf. He was urgently pleading for prayer, obviously confident in its power. He hopes that he will be kept safe on his journey and be able to come to Jerusalem as he desires. There were many Jews in Judea that were hostile to Paul and the gospel as he once was. Thus, he knew he might be endangered. Getting to Jerusalem would bring him great joy if God so willed, which he did (Acts 21) though he was eventually imprisoned. He would be able to be refreshed and encouraged in their presence. The church should indeed be a place of security, a place that we know will pray for us in our time of need, and a place of peace and rest rather than strife and division. A godly church makes sure to take care of the needs of the household of God first (Galatians 6:10). Paul blesses them by wishing them peace in the name of Christ.

## **Romans 16**

**1**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

**2that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.**

Paul affirms the reputation and character of Phoebe, a sister in Christ and servant of the Lord. The word for servant is the same word for deacon that is used elsewhere in the New Testament, meaning one who serves. There is no reason to infer, however, that she held the office of deacon. Regardless, she was a woman who served the Lord faithfully and ministered willingly to others. Cenchrea was a neighboring city to Corinth. The saints were to receive Phoebe honorably and openly, giving her what she needed. Paul testified that this woman of God had done many things to help others, including himself.

**3Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,  
4who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;  
5also greet the church that is in their house Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.**

Aquila and Prisca (as in Acts 18:1-3) worked alongside Paul as fellow tentmakers and ministers of the gospel. They had taken Paul into their home, and at some point risked their own lives to save him. This is what all brothers and sisters in Christ should be willing to do for one another. Thus, Paul was thankful as well as all those who knew Paul and believed that he was a servant of God. By preserving his life, these godly friends enabled Paul to continue to carry out his calling as apostle to the Gentiles. Prisca and Aquila had a church in their home to which Paul wanted to send on his greetings. Epaenetus was dearly loved by Paul, and he was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

**6Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.**

Other than the fact that she labored extremely hard for the sake of the church, we don't know much else about Mary, another faithful servant of the Lord.

**7Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.**

Andronicus and Junias were perhaps relatives of Paul given that he refers to them as kinsmen rather than brothers or beloved. They also were evidently prisoners with him at one point or another. These individuals had a high reputation of faithfulness even among the other apostles who were chosen by God before Paul ever encountered Christ.

**8Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.**

Nothing is known conclusively about Ampliatus other than the fact that Paul loved him deeply as a brother in Christ.

**9Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.**

Again, nothing more is known other than they were counted faithful by Paul for having worked alongside of him. He again expresses his love for these dear people in the Lord.

**10Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.**

Whether Apelles is another name for Apollos is unclear. That Apelles was faithful and trustworthy in Christ is clear. Paul then sends his greetings on to the household of Aristobulus. Whether or not Aristobulus himself was a believer is not obvious, though certainly some in his household were.

**11Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.**

Perhaps of the household of Herod, Herodion was a relative of Paul. Narcissus may or may not have been a follower of Christ, but again many in his household evidently were. This Narcissus may have been emperor Claudius' secretary. We know that the gospel had been taken throughout the entire praetorian guard (Philippians 1:13).

**12Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.**

These three women were faithful laborers in Christ and deserved to be greeted from Paul in the name of the Lord.

**13Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.**

Scholars believe that Rufus was a son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ. Rufus' mother may have cared for Paul at some time, but scholars do not believe that they were blood relatives. Paul refers to Rufus as a chosen man in the Lord as having been called by Christ unto salvation.

**14Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.**

**15Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.**

These faithful men and women were likely well known in the church at Rome for their faithfulness and service. Since Paul says that there were brethren with them and others with them, it is reasonable to conclude that they may have been those who exercised some degree of oversight over various ministries of the church.

**16Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.**

The kissing was a continuation of the Jewish custom to greet one another by a kiss on the forehead, cheek, or beard. This was common among friends, and it was absorbed into the church as a holy kiss in that it was a way of properly welcoming others into the fellowship as family and friends. Paul had perhaps been told to pass on greetings to this church on behalf of other churches that he had been visiting. He thus sends their greetings on.

**17Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.**

**18For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.**

Paul warns these mature and faithful believers to be wary lest they fall prey to deception in the church. Even these mature believers could be led astray, thus Paul commanded them to exercise discernment. They were to watch out for those who caused divisions, strife, worthless arguments, and dissension. They were to keep an eye out for those who caused the faithful to doubt or be distracted from studying and keeping sound doctrine. The teaching of the false teachers would be contrary to what Paul had instructed them. False teachers can thus be known by the error of their teaching and also through the result of their teaching, which is faction. Paul commands the believers to stay away from these types of people, deviating from their wicked course, and even shunning them, which is implied in the word. These wicked men do not serve the Lord but themselves and their fleshly appetites. What they are seeking is anything but the glory of God and the welfare of the church. They are only seeking what they can gain, whether recognition, money, status, or some other carnal ambition. They are good talkers who will convince others that they are sheep when in fact they are wolves in sheeps' clothing. They speak words to gain the confidence and trust of others, though their words are mere empty flattery. Those who are unaware, unsuspecting, and not keeping an eye out will be taken and deceived. We as believers must be aware that it is standard procedure for the devil to enter the body of Christ and try to drag away sheep. He obviously must disguise himself as an angel of light in order to do this (2 Corinthians 11:14). Thus, we must know doctrine so that we don't fall for false teaching, and we must be discerning enough to see what the fruit is of such a person's "ministry." We must suspect that false teachers will exist.

**19For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.**

Paul compliments this church for its obedience, for their reputation is well-known throughout the Christian world. This brings him great joy, though he is aware that past faithfulness does not guarantee future faithfulness. Thus, he warns them to be wise about good things and innocent of evil things. We are to be shrewd as serpents, having great discernment, but we are to be innocent as doves, free from any guile or sin (Matthew 10:16). The more sin we are familiar with, the easier it is to fall back into it. The more we think on what is good (Philippians 4:8), the more we can experience the peace of God and the steadfastness of commitment to Him (Isaiah 26:3).



**20The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.**

Though Satan is free to roam this earth tempting and deceiving, his doom is sure. When we die to go and be with the Lord, we can be sure that death will have no sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). Sin no longer has any power over us, but we will have to struggle against Satan's powers and those who serve him on the earth. Soon, since life is but a vapor, we will be with Christ, and we will experience the fullness of our victory in Christ which crushed Satan under our feet (Genesis 3:15).

**21Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.**

This Timothy is likely Paul's disciple in Christ to whom he addressed several New Testament epistles. Lucius could be the Lucius in Acts 13:1-3 who was a teacher in Antioch, it could be another form of Luke, or it could be another Lucius altogether. Jason could refer to one of the first converts in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10), and Sosipater could be the same as Sopater referred to in Acts 20:4-6. These men Paul says were kinsmen, perhaps implying that they were blood relatives.

**22I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.**

Tertius wrote the letter down for Paul who evidently dictated it to him. He sends on his personal greetings.

**23Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.**

Gaius could be the same as the one in 1 Corinthians 1:14 who was a convert of Paul at Corinth. Perhaps the church met at his house. Erastus was obviously the city treasurer, and Quartus could be his physical brother or a brother in Christ. Nothing more is known.

**24[The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]**

This verse is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

**25Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,**

**26but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;**

**27to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.**

This is thus the preferred benediction to the letter. Paul exalts God who is able to anchor, establish, strengthen, and build the church which is dear to His heart. The gospel is the seed of faith, and it is propagated by the preaching of it. This gospel is the revelation of things that prophets of old wanted to understand but couldn't quite decipher (1 Peter 1:10-12). Now the mystery has been revealed that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is building His church, and that the Gentiles are invited into His fold. This had been God's intention from the beginning, and He alone is wise. God is most certainly worthy of glory forever.

These final chapters have many references to brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul dearly loved these people and was burdened to pray for them all likely by name and regularly. This is a testament to the community and love that was found in the early church, particularly in the churches which held to sound doctrine and grew to maturity in their understanding of Scripture and in their love for one another. In a day and age where travel and communication was much more difficult than it is today, these people did a fantastic job of keeping the faith and communicating love to one another.

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