

# A Study of Romans

Volume I, Romans 1-7

*Bob Faulkner*

# **A Study of Romans**

Transcripts of  
Sermonaudio Podcasts  
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Volume I, Romans 1-7

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## DEDICATION

To my friends at the Brynford Bible Church In Chicago,  
who allowed me to share much of this content from their pulpit.

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## **Preface.**

It is hard to raise children in an audio-visual age, where adults have less and less control over what enters their children's mind. Bombarded by internet, videos, tv, even school lessons.

It is equally hard to teach God's people. So many want entertainment, the big screen, slick visuals, crisp audios. In many churches good preaching means looking at a video of a preacher in some other building. Less and less personal. The music is electronic and loud. And God's people seem to want it that way.

The best medicine, or best diet, for any church anywhere is a clear and careful and deep verse by verse exposition of the revelation that was given to the apostles. Those who build on any other foundation are endangering, sickening, the people of God. We don't get our views from someone else's theology books, current religious trends, TV preachers. We must simply open the book and see what the text says. Many will find this method hopelessly boring and irrelevant. But may God's men ignore the goats and keep feeding the sheep.

That's what I intend to do in this study, to supplement what already happens in God's pulpits.

I am going to take the scenic view of the letter to Rome. I will use the letter in fact as a starting point to many Biblical teachings, using words and verses that are topics of teachings that can be found elsewhere in Scripture. We won't just study Romans, but anything Romans suggests.

The format will be very basic. One verse at a time, as they were delivered over a 17-month period in 2018 and 2019. The recordings can be found –

at this publishing – at [www.sermonaudio.com/aservant70](http://www.sermonaudio.com/aservant70). The sermon series “Romans” will take you to over 130 Audios that cover the entire book of Romans. The present volume is the transcript record of the first seven chapters or 59 recordings. Each recording is 15 to 20 minutes.

### **Stephen’s legacy.**

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. Do not hold this sin against them.”

This is the prayer of Stephen, the Spirit-filled deacon who gave his life for Jesus. This is recorded in Acts 7:60, and the prayer came from the heart and the Holy Spirit. The prayer was heard in Heaven and experienced on earth.

It was experienced by the man in charge of this stoning, one named Saul. Saul truly was forgiven of the awful sin of slaughtering a believer in Jesus. Stephen’s prayer was answered.

Now move ahead in time more than 20 years, and we are in a home in Corinth, where Paul is staying during one of his missionary trips. He will be in this city for a year and a half, which for him was an unusually long time and in an unusually wicked city. But the Lord has many in that city who are about to be converted. Still he finds time to reach out from Corinth by letter, to a church and city where he has never been, but where he somehow knows he will visit one day, Rome.

### **Why the letter to the Romans?**

It is the winter of 57 A. D. Paul is about to depart to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor saints there (Romans 15:22-27). A woman who works in that Corinthian church, named Phoebe, is on her way to Rome, so he sends this letter by her (Romans 16:1-2).

All of this takes place before God tells him He will indeed be going to Rome, confirming that vague notion in His head (Acts 23:11) that he would be going.

So that's why Rome, and the why of the book of Romans. Why, in the natural, anyway. God had a lot of reasons for this letter. But Paul had never been to Rome. They in that place knew of him and he knew of them. He writes to let them know he is on the way. That he wants to meet them.

He wants to edify believers (Romans 1:11), to preach the Gospel (Romans 1:15), the good news that he received because of that prayer of Stephen, to receive encouragement from them (Romans 1:12, 15:32), even to receive support for his planned trip to Spain (Romans 15:28).

He will arrive in Rome three years after this epistle, but as a prisoner. Our own plans look like this sometimes...

He writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon while in a Roman jail, believing that release is coming. The Book of Acts ends upbeat, with Paul seeing visitors in his long period of house arrest.

He is indeed released, most believe, but then imprisoned again, and he writes second Timothy from Rome, knowing no release is in the offing this time. 2 Timothy 4:6-8:

"I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith..." The positive confession people of our day would have cringed to hear this come out of his mouth [remember Peter trying to detract Jesus], and even blamed his death on those negative words. There is a difference between negativism and realism. Paul had a revelation from God. And what is negative about leaving this planet to be with the Lord of glory?

Remember we are not promised, in this New testament age, a particular number of years. Long life is not necessarily a prize for us. Eternal life is what we strive for.

This final moment was five years after he first arrived in Rome.



On this night in Corinth in 57, he knows none of this. He simply wants to communicate a clear description of the message of Jesus to these folks in Rome, because they are going to need it. Oh that the church of Rome had stayed grounded in Paul's words!

### **Questions dealt with in Romans.**

Now, this letter, like so many of his letters, is not written to correct doctrine or life-style, for the church, though young, was sound in what it knew (though it did not know much), but with some dangerous tendencies. All churches can swerve to right or left if not given godly counsel. We need someone to teach us more and more from the Scriptures.

Anyway, here are some of the issues of this letter:

What is the nature of the Gospel of Christ? Of Grace? Of forgiveness?

Is the Mosaic law final and authoritative?

How does God justify the guilty through grace, before they have had a chance to perform good works to prove their worthiness?

Should Gentiles become Jewish before they become Christian?

How is this life lived out in practical ways?

These things are still relevant to us. Consider: Not just how mankind is justified before God, but how will you be justified before God? It's an eternal topic that needs examining. Why do you get to go to Heaven, and so many others do not? Now that you are in Christ, what is your life supposed to look like?

### **The church in Rome and the church today.**

Let me say a little about the church in Rome. See Acts 2:10, the Pentecost passage. “...Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya... *visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes...*”

There were believers from Rome on that special day we call, and the Jews called, Pentecost. The Spirit fell on them, converted them. They had just enough fire and knowledge to be the nucleus of a group of believers in the city of Rome.

That initial fire is never enough for a lifetime. Letters from apostles are needed for them and for us, to know the rest of the mind of the Lord. Too many today trust an experience to carry them all the way home. Experience is essential. That’s how it all begins. But that is not what we are to seek afterwards. As newborn babies, we are to desire the pure milk of the word, says Peter. Too many ignore down-to-earth apostolic teachings, and with itching ears, looking for more and more experiences, they flock around people who promise the same! An experience a day is not necessarily on the road to Heaven.

Rather, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Rather, “Your Word is a light to my path.” We are to stay constantly in the teachings God has given us. Forty different men over a 1600-year period, wrote words that were little by little gathered by the Holy Spirit into one volume, so that the people of God would have all the Light they could possibly use to be the Light that God wants to use.

### **The evolution of the church of Rome into today’s Romanism.**

But regarding the evolution of the church in Rome. Rome was the political center of the world. The church, at first, was a despised, persecuted part of that empire. But the church grew in numbers and then in influence, political influence. In the centuries that passed, the Roman church government began to look like the Roman Empire’s government in its practices, its offices, its methods. In fact, a hybrid church was being formed that was part spiritual and true, part political and false. It is with

us still. [And it can happen to any congregation that is not satisfied with God's ways and wants the ways of the world to be introduced].

We who live in a free land must be careful not to be depending on government for our answers, not to be mixing with political government in the churches. We are a separated people. God is our President and King and Emperor. And our provider.

We honor rulers. Pay our taxes. But we do not copy them or depend on them. Let Rome serve as a horrible example, to be avoided, of government interference and dependence.

The growing church of Rome, being in the capital city, came to believe that it had the right to rule the rest of the church, even though Biblically Jerusalem was the center of everything now and in the future, as in the New Jerusalem.

Over the first decades there were actually five major centers of Christianity, but the Roman pontiffs began to claim more and more authority over the church until much of that church just believed God had spoken Rome into leadership, or they were forced into allegiance by political concerns. They bowed to Rome's authority. The church of Jesus somehow became known as the Roman Catholic Church.

Nowhere had God predicted a Roman center for God's people. No human capital was in the mind of Jesus when He told the woman at the well that "neither here nor in Jerusalem" will men worship, but rather the Spirit of God will be the center of the worship of Jesus.

But Rome never got that. And it was that Romanism, still a political monstrosity that some have equated with the mystery known as Babylon. Some reformers and Puritans connected Rome to antichrist. And all who came out of her knew, this is not the simple faith that Jesus started.

We always must emphasize that we are not talking about individual Catholics, but a system out of which God eventually calls His people.

The true church is headquartered in Heaven. Its members are in many of the groups called churches all over the world. The boundaries of that church are unknown. But the work of calling out and saving and equipping those who have been chosen of God to salvation has gone on in spite of all that ignorance on our part, and will continue until He comes and takes away His people one day, and sets them up to rule and reign with Him. Even in the worst days of Romanism, God had a people.

### **Thank you, John MacArthur**

John MacArthur's 1991 two-volume commentary on Romans will be alluded to often in this work. I recommend you order that book from Amazon (or wherever) for a fuller more scholarly approach to this study. I will quote him now and then, but know that his volumes were near my desk every step of the way.

I have taken the liberty of copying his entire outline of the book of Romans here:

*Greetings, Intro, & Theme, 1:1-17.*

*Condemnation. The need of God's Righteousness (1:18-3:20)*

*Justification. The Provision of God's Righteousness. (3:21-5:21)*

*Sanctification. Demonstration of God's Righteousness. (6:1-8:39)*

(The present volume will take us through chapter 7 only.)

*Restoration. Israel and God's Righteousness. (9:1-11:36)*

*Application. The Behavior of God's Righteousness. (12:1-15:13)*

*Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction. (15:14-16:27)*

The basic message of the letter : God's Righteousness vs Man's righteousness., but the letter answers a lot of questions on the way to finalizing this discussion. I borrow this listing also from MacArthur:

What is the good news of God?

Is Jesus really God?

What is God like?

How can God send people to Hell?

Why do men reject God and His Son Jesus Christ?

Why are there false religions and idols?

What is man's biggest sin?

Why are there sex perversions, hatred, crime, dishonesty, and all the other evils in the world, and why are they so pervasive and rampant?

What is the standard by which God condemns people?

How can a person who has never heard the Gospel be held spiritually responsible?

Do Jews have a greater responsibility to believe than Gentiles?

Who is a true Jew?

Is there any spiritual advantage to being Jewish?

How good is man in himself?

How evil is man in himself?

Can any person keep God's laws perfectly?

How can a person know he is a sinner?

How can a sinner be forgiven and justified by God?

How is a Christian related to Abraham?

What is the importance of Christ's death?

What is the importance of His resurrection?

What is the importance of His present life in Heaven?

For whom did Christ die?

Where can men find real peace and hope?

How are all men related spiritually to Adam?

How are believers related spiritually to Jesus Christ?

What is grace and what does it do?

How are God's grace and God's law related?

How does a person die spiritually and become reborn?

What is the Christian's relation to sin?

How important is obedience in the Christian life?

Why is living a faithful Christian life such a struggle?

How many natures does a Christian have?

What does the Holy Spirit do for a believer?

How intimate is a Christian's relationship to God?

Why is there suffering?

Will the world ever be different?

What are election and predestination?

How can Christians pray properly?

How secure is a believer's salvation?

What is God's present plan for Israel?

What is His future plan for Israel?

Why and for what have the gentiles been chosen by God?

What is the Christian's responsibility to Jews and to Israel?

What is true spiritual commitment?

What is the Christian's relationship to the world in general, to the unsaved, to other Christians, and to human government?

What is genuine love, and how does it work?

How do Christians deal with issues that are neither right or wrong in themselves?

What is true freedom?

How important is unity in the church?

### **Other resources**

My other go-to helps for this study were Berry's *Interlinear KJV*, *The Precise Parallel New Testament*, The 1985 edition of Unger's *Bible Dictionary*, various Bible translations, the major ones being *The English Standard Version*, *the New King James Version*, and *the King James Version*. There were occasional trips online to *Wikipedia*, and the *Bible Hub*. Of course, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* was in constant use too.

In other words, I have done nothing more than any serious Bible student could do, and I encourage my readers to tackle this and other portions of the Bible in like manner.

### **Romans**

Through the years, people have had much praise for this letter to the Romans:

An unbeliever sat one day crying about how wicked his life had been. A scroll of Romans was nearby and he read chapter 13, which says in part, "... put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh." Later the man wrote, "No further would I read, nor did I need... all the gloom of doubt vanished away." That was Augustine.

1000 years later, Martin Luther praised Romans: "It is the chief part of the New Testament and the perfect gospel . . . the absolute epitome of the gospel." More than that! A verse from Romans, 5:1, changed Luther forever. What power in the Word! But wait, there's more. That verse, because it changed Luther, changed the Roman Catholic system to which Luther was connected. [counter-reformation]

More than that! It changed the course of world history. Wars have been fought between those claiming to be Christians on the Catholic and the Protestant side. The religious map was reorganized. One could argue that our free nation, whose founding fathers sought refuge from the persecutions of Rome, this very nation built its constitution on the basis of Luther's discovery and reformation.

So Romans is worth a look. A serious look. And like all the Bible, no matter how many times you have examined it, it will still yield to you precious insights if you are patient enough to dig deeper and deeper!

Luther's successor Philip Melancthon called Romans, "The compendium [summary, abstract] of Christian doctrine."

John Wesley would read Luther's preface to the book of Romans and feel his heart "strangely warmed". He had assurance that God had taken away his sins, "and saved me from the law of sin and death."

John Calvin said of the Book of Romans, "When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."

Samuel Coleridge, English poet and literary critic said Paul's letter to the Romans is "The most profound work in existence."



G. Campbell Morgan said Romans was “the most pessimistic page of literature upon which your eyes ever rested” and at the same time, “the most optimistic poem to which your ears ever listened.”

We could add Tyndale and Bunyan and Barnhouse and many more. But the point is made.

**And now, The Text, one verse at a time, accompanied by the teaching transcript used in a 17-month series of audios on this precious letter.**

**1:1.**

“Paul.” We first meet him on the Damascus Road. But his life is told in other parts of the book of Acts, and the epistles. Circumcised the 8th day. Sent to Jerusalem to study eventually under Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, the most famous rabbi of Jewish history, except for Jesus Himself.

Paul is busy persecuting the church when Jesus stops him. In his account to King Agrippa he mentions that Jesus told him it was hard for him to kick against the “goad.” MacArthur points out that a goad was a “long pointed stick used to herd stubborn livestock. He was poked in the flank or just above the heel.” He adds that this was a common expression used to indicate opposition to deity. Paul must have been shocked to find that what he thought was pleasing God, was not.

We see Ananias in the book of Acts account, fearfully approaching him, praying over him, baptizing him.

Paul picks up the story himself in places like 1 Timothy 1:12-15:

Jesus “...counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief...”

Galatians 1:16-24. He is led, like His Master, into the desert to hear from God, to set the stage for the rest of his ministry. He eventually meets with other apostles. He joins up with Barnabas and begins an itinerant ministry, starting churches, imparting the Spirit, working miracles. These two split up, and God provides Silas. Timothy. Titus. After three missionary journeys into Asia and Europe, he is arrested in Jerusalem. Eventually he is sent to Rome, to whom he is writing now.

Paul was a man saturated with the Scriptures of His day, what we would call the Old Testament. You will notice in this letter alone references to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi, Joel, Nahum, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Ezekiel.

Using the Jewish Scriptures against the Jewish beliefs put him at odds with the Jewish leadership. And the Jews found ways to get him in trouble with Gentile leadership, as they had with Jesus. Thus the description found in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

“... in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often; in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness- and besides all this, what comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the churches...”

“A bondservant of Jesus Christ.”

Bondservant. KJV, Servant. Greek, *Doulos*. A slave. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 he is *diakonos*, a mere table waiter, a servant. And in that same book, 4:1, he is a galley slave. Those are the men at the bottom of the boat, rowing.

Paul uses the Hebrew understanding (thus elevating the concept as might have been experienced in the Roman world) as in Exodus 21:5-6. “If a

slave [who could go out free after so many years of service] plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children. I will not go out free.' Then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever."

He is not one captured by some brutish master who beats him every day. But he sells out in love to one who is worthy of submission. One who cares for him and his family.

Paul loves his Master. What He wants, Paul will do. My Master doesn't beat me every day, Paul would say. He took a beating for me. He takes care of me. I'm his forever. End of conversation.

Do we consider ourselves servants of Jesus in this manner? Isn't He a good Master? Hasn't He been good to us? Does He treat us badly? Does he ask us to do things we cannot do? Then, can He expect to receive obedience from us the moment He calls on us? Are we willing to say, "I will *not* be free" to live this life my own way, "I will serve you forever"?

"Called to be an Apostle."

Paul was Called. We toss this word "called" around a lot. I'm talking about the actual audible Voice of Jesus here. Not appointed by men. Nowhere are Christ's true apostles appointed by men in Scripture. You say, what about Matthias? I believe he was appointed by men, but not necessarily directly by Jesus. This mystery of who is the twelfth apostle is not resolved in Scripture, but please understand that there were twelve apostles called directly by the voice of Jesus, even after Judas is ruled out.

If Jesus Himself does not call, the office does not exist. Many today claim the office but cannot describe a true calling. Rather, they have been appointed by men, and what they might call an inner witness (and that's a phrase that needs examining too).

One thing for sure. We must accept the notion that the Scripture is clear about: there are and always have been false apostles:

2 Corinthians 11:12-13. Paul wanted to “cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

Look at the *second* letter to the Ephesians. It’s found in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, verse 2. “... You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.”

How do you test a would-be apostle? For starters, Do they have real miracles? Do they have serious persecution, scars? Do they teach the Scriptures that the original apostles wrote? Do they have proof of an actual call from Heaven by Jesus? All of the true apostles knew that the others had been called by Jesus. They traveled with Him. Even Paul had witnesses on the road to Damascus that a miraculous encounter had taken place.

Paul wants the Roman church to know that, incredible as it might seem to them, he is an apostle on the same level as the others. When he is speaking before King Agrippa, just before his journey to Rome, he gives us the specifics of that call (Acts 26:16-18): (Jesus is talking.)

“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Rise, stand on your feet; I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen [right now, the resurrected Jesus] and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Very specific!

We must spend a little more time on this subject of apostles, as it is so vital for today’s church.

Apostle. Greek, One sent. The word missionary is from another language, the Latin, but it means the same thing. So those who claim there are no apostles of any kind, have to back up a little when they speak of missionaries, since that name is not in Scripture, but it means the exact same thing as apostle. The differentiation between a Scripture apostle and any in our day is that the originals were apostles of, called by, Jesus, personally, supernaturally. All others are apostles of the church, sent out, gifted, a true blessing, but not authoritative.

A word about the apostolic movement of our day. There is a movement known as the NAR that truly believes that authoritative apostles are being restored to the church. In their thinking the church needs a total restructuring, with themselves at the top.

Rome teaches that the bishops of Rome are the successors of the authoritative apostles. That apostles never ended their ministry.

Fact is the apostles played their role in the first century. They were given the doctrines that have become the foundational teachings of the church in every generation. They were given accompanying miracles to attest to their validity. They died. They are no longer with us, except in the Scriptures. They played their role. We now have their writings as the foundation. I am sharing with you even now the work of an apostle, but I am not one. What I say to you is totally authoritative, because of their authority, not my own.

Be aware that these men and this movement exist. It is a major factor in the present church culture. It seems like it is not going away. Many faces you see on Christian TV are men who believe they are apostles and have authority over your lives. Many revivals and movements of the church overseas are NAR related. This is huge. Be aware and awake. They sound good, look good, but they are not the real deal. The foundation is not going to be laid again!

“Separated to...”

We are not all called to be church leaders, but we are all called to be separated. You don't have to do this to yourself. It will happen to you as you follow Jesus. Separated is passive here. It was done by God. Saul of Tarsus was in big with the Jewish people. He was surrounded by many who shared his opinions and goals. He did not work alone. He was part of an anti-Jesus movement. He had connections. He was on his way up, a rising star in the Jewish brotherhood.

And he was a Pharisee! The word Pharisee means "separated". Two hundred years before Jesus, a group of Jewish men decided that the Greek culture had had too many inroads into their own way of life. They separated themselves. They would not participate in the Greek ways. They would be holy unto God. Separate. Pharisee.

But when God called him on that Damascus Road, he was separated *by God!* God did it! Connections broken. Old things passed away. Old friends removed. Old ideas replaced.

All of this happened with Martin Luther, too. He had no desire to leave the established church. He loved that church. But that church left him, when he received the true Gospel from this very book of Romans.

That will take place in your life if it has not. I have found that it is not a one-time separation. As I learn new things in the Word, and begin sharing them, there are always some who don't get it, or don't want it, and I am separated to move on, alone if necessary. Eventually we will be separated from this body and this planet. Separation is a good thing, though not very pleasant at first.

Young children are known to have separation anxiety. When Mom leaves the room, the baby wants to know, "Is she coming back?" We don't like separation. It tears away at our flesh. But God heals the wounds and unites us to things and people that are far more valuable than that from which we were separated.

"The Gospel of God."

This word, *euangelion*, will be used sixty times in the letter. The epistle begins with the word in the first verse, and ends with it in the third last verse. And it is sprinkled all the way through. This letter is about good news.

According to MacArthur, now on page 9 of his commentary, that word “Gospel” was a common term in the cult of emperor worship. I’m quoting now:

“Many of the Caesars claimed deity for themselves and demanded worship from every person in the Empire, free or slave, rich or poor, renowned or unknown. Favorable events relating to the emperor were proclaimed to the citizens as ‘good news’. The town herald would stand in the village square and shout ‘Good news! The emperor’s wife has given birth to a son,’ or ‘Good news! The emperor’s heir has come of age.’”

Paul brought a new meaning to the word. This was the “Good News!” of God! Man’s news, even though it be about an emperor, is inferior to God’s news. The old ways cannot save us. We needed something new. And God has revealed this news in detail to the apostle Paul who in turn shares that information with us. We need to grab every detail!

## **1:2**

“Which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”

What Gospel are we talking about? We just learned that it is

1. the Gospel of God. It is also
2. the Gospel that God promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The Gospel did not begin in the New testament books. This was not an after-thought, some totally new concept. Muslims like to suggest that just as Jesus had a new revelation superseding that of Moses, so Muhammad had a new revelation that perfects Jesus. Our response is that Moses and Jesus taught the same thing. Moses anticipated Jesus in every law, every

sacrifice. The Old Testament prophets predicted the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Himself said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Muhammad's "revelation" was totally disconnected from the Scriptures of God, and was an obvious attempt to overshadow and confuse the narratives already given in their completion by the end of the first century.

Every trained Jew knew about the Holy Scriptures. In Paul's day there were twenty-two books. They were not yet called "The Old Testament" as we call them, because the New Testament books had not yet circulated and been collected into a unit. They were simply "The Scriptures".

Jesus used that term often: Matthew 22:29, to the Sadducees He said, "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures." Mark 14:49, before He died, "The Scriptures must be fulfilled." Luke 24:27, after the resurrection, "He expounded to the disciples, from all the Scriptures."

Jesus believed in and quoted often from, those twenty-two books!

But you say, I thought there were thirty-nine books in the Jewish Scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament. Our Scriptures are identical to theirs, but arranged differently. Combine the two books of Samuel into one; two books of Kings into one; two books of Chronicles into one; Ezra and Nehemiah, one; the twelve minor prophets, one; and with Josephus' help in the first century, Ruth and Judges, one; Lamentations and Jeremiah, one. Twenty two books, made to correspond to the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

God, somewhere in those twenty-two books, made some promises of good news. Peter verifies this in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

"Of this salvation [of Jesus] the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them [these same prophets] it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us [you] they were ministering the things



which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...”

Some scholars have found over three hundred such promises. We will look at a few.

Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. (the prophet **Moses**)

“And I [God] will put enmity between you [Satan/serpent] and between your seed and her Seed [offspring]; He [Seed of woman] shall bruise your head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His heel.” [ Satan will win a temporary victory, followed by the total demise of this enemy.]

Psalms 16:10-11. Jesus will rise from the dead. Conquer sin and the grave. (Peter quotes this Psalm and calls **David** a prophet)

“For You [God] will not leave my [David’s, Jesus’] soul in Sheol [place of the dead], nor will You allow Your Holy One [can only mean Jesus!] to see corruption. You will show me the path of life.”

The prophet **Isaiah** pictures perfectly the ugly scene we call Calvary. Isaiah 53: 3-6

“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed... the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

The prophet **Jeremiah** speaks of a new covenant that will be coming to us, as a result of what Jesus will do. Jeremiah 31:33-34

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;

and I will be their God, and they shall be My people... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

The prophet **Joel** also talks of that day, when the Spirit of God will make all things new. Joel 2:28, 32

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh... whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The prophet **Micah** tells us the very place where Jesus will be born, hundreds of years before the fact. Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem... though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

And this Gospel is

**1:3**

“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord...”

The news is not good news unless it is about Jesus.

Paul is very specific here. His Name means something. First He is Jesus, the Savior. In Hebrew, *Joshua* or *Yeshua*. The deliverer. The one who took us out of the land of bondage and will take us into the promised land, as the original Joshua did. The one who took our sins in His own body on the tree, canceling the debt we owed and could not pay. Jesus. Savior.

Then He is Christ. The anointed one. The Messiah. The King chosen from the foundation of the world because He existed from before that foundation, through all eternity with the Father. The King of Kings.

And He is our Lord. He is Lord of all or not Lord at all. Lord of the universe but our personal Lord. You have known Him as Savior, well and good, but

have you acknowledged Him as Lord, the only One Who has a right to order your life. Not just the Lord, but *our* Lord.

Savior, King, Lord.

I want to add here just a footnote about textual issues in the Bible. Why now? Because we have already come to a textual issue. Definitely not serious, but worthy of note as an intro to the whole topic of textual criticism, then we hurry back to the text.

It is the teaching of the Christian Church through the ages that only the original documents of the inspired writers are inspired of God. The transmission of these texts for so many thousands of years is a story of a miracle, but not of perfection. Some of the ancient texts, from which we obtain our translations, vary from each other on minor things. If you translate from one text, you get one reading. If you translate from another, you get another.

So it is not enough to say, well, my Bible comes from the original and yours doesn't.

I have in my study two Greek texts. Neither are originals. We have no originals. These two texts differ from one another in minor points. Some swear that the *Textus Receptus*, which helped give us the KJV and the NKJV, is the Greek text we should follow. And they have good reasons. Others are convinced, also by good reasons, that the *Nestle-Aland* text is the one to follow. Do your study. Decide which text is best.

No doctrine of any importance to us is at stake, but we should be aware of the issue. Right here in Romans 1:3 there is a variation. If you were not reading a KJV related text just now, you did not see the words "Jesus Christ Our Lord" in verse 3. Those words are not in the Greek. Not here. And as you are reading along in the Greek in verse 4, the words show up.

Either way, the text is true. We are talking about His Son, who by the way, is Jesus Christ our Lord, *wherever the words are found*. There are things

like this, some more serious, but none so serious as to challenge, as I say, any doctrine of importance to us.

We don't stress over such things, but we are not blind either, and we should be ready when a critic comes along trying to tear the Scriptures down. We simply reply that the originals were inspired of God, and the translations we have contain all the truth necessary. And if you want proof of the pudding, tell them, try the eating. Come to Christ and see if His Word is not true and powerful and alive. We should be able to point to our own lives as testimony of the truth of Scripture!

Jesus told the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life." In other words, you put every word in order, and look all over the Book to be sure you have the right meanings, but the obvious message, *Me*, you don't get."

This Book has it all. We preach this Word even if no translation is absolutely perfect. Preach what's in the Word, Jesus, and results will follow.

"who was born of the seed of David ..."

This Jesus, the King, was born of the seed of David.

From Solomon, right? Let's look at it in the Old Testament. Solomon's descendants were the kings of Judah. Men whom you probably know. Rehoboam. Asa. Jehoshaphat. Uzziah. Hezekiah. Then some bad kings. Then Josiah. Then more bad kings. Worse and worse. But all were descended from David, down to Christ, right?

Josiah's son was Jeconiah. Also called Jehoiachin. Also called Coniah. He was a real loser, and brought the Lord to a conclusion that one never thinks he'll see, reading the Bible through for the first time: Israel would have to be suspended as a nation.

But before I continue on with the line, we must look at Jeremiah, the prophet who lived when Coniah lived. Look at Jeremiah 22:28 ff, a prophecy about this wicked man and his descendants:

“Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol -a vessel in which is no pleasure? [ answer, yes ] Why are they cast out, he and his descendants... O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord: Write down this man as childless [note, “as” but not actually]. A man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of *his descendants* shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.”

Seed of David. Solomon. Some good kings. Some bad. Josiah. Jeconiah. Look at Matthew 1: Jeconiah had a son: Shealtiel. One son after another until we come into the first century and a man named Joseph.

Look how Matthew describes the lineage of Jesus: Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom (Mary) was born Jesus who is called Christ. The prophecy was true. No one from the seed of Solomon, that leads through this evil Jeconiah, will sit on David’s throne. Joseph did not.

But someone from the seed of David will.

Only explanation: must be another son of David through whom the Messiah will reign. Hence we have Luke’s genealogy, thanks be to God. Luke 3:23ff. We go backwards, starting with Jesus. “Being (as was supposed!) the son of Joseph...” But he wasn’t the son of Joseph. And Joseph’s father is not Jacob in Luke, it is Heli. The scholars have concluded that this was his father-in-law, that is, Mary’s father.

Trace it back, and you come to David through another son, verse 31. Nathan. God’s Word must always be true. Jesus is of the seed of David, and heir to David’s throne, not through the cursed line, but through a blessed one.

“According to the flesh.”

The word flesh is used in two ways in Scripture as far as humans are concerned. It is on one hand, merely the physical part of who we are. Flesh and blood. But Paul and others, knowing the Scriptures and knowing of the fall of man, uses the term “flesh” to describe fallen man’s nature.

Obviously we are talking here of flesh and blood. He was, humanly speaking, the seed of David. Divinely speaking, He was descended from, and one with, the Holy Spirit. God Himself.

That brings up a lot of issues about the nature of Jesus, that I think I must pass up here, except to say that this Jesus is all God, and all man, in a union we shall never fathom. It is beyond us, how God can become a man. The Witnesses and the Muslims and the Jews just write it off as impossible and throw accusations of blasphemy our way.

But it’s true anyway. John 1:14, the Word, second person of the Holy Godhead, Emmanuel – God with us - became flesh, and so sanctified that flesh that it was perfect from the beginning. Though there was no Immaculate Conception of Mary, an invention of Rome, there was indeed such a conception of Jesus.

#### **1:4**

“and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Still talking about Jesus here. Jesus Christ, and using the tense of verse three, where He was born, was also declared to be, the Son of God. A declaration was made. A decree sounded forth. A definition of Sonship and power was sent to the world. He was shown to be God’s Son by rising from the dead. Notice that this resurrection is not like Lazarus and others, a resuscitated corpse. But a totally re-done, glorified person, which the Word says is a model of what is going to happen to us!

Notice the parallel with verse three. In that verse Jesus is the seed of David, the Son of Man, according to, or by virtue of, in accordance with the fact of, His flesh. His human nature. The Word was made flesh.

But Jesus is the God-man. In verse four He is declared to be the Son of *God*, according to the Spirit. The Spirit of Holiness. The Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit that brought Jesus back to life. Made flesh, but He remained the eternal Word. And if that Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, dwells in you, what...?

This dual understanding of Jesus' sonship is further brought out by references to Psalm 2:7. Both Paul and the writer to the Hebrews bring out a truth of Jesus being the Son, but they bring out a different truth. First let's read Psalm 2:7: God says,

"I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, You are My Son, today have I begotten You."

Here is how Hebrews handles this verse: The writer quotes David, then quotes two more passages to let you know what David meant.

First, 2 Samuel 7:14: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son." We're talking parenting here, and nothing else. He goes on again with another verse talking of "when He brings the firstborn into the world," namely, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

Now Paul, in Acts 13:33 says that Psalm 2:7 is a proof of the resurrection. Here is God declaring publicly that this resurrected Jesus is His very Son, the One He brought into the world 30 years earlier. No contradiction. Those who try to make Psalm 2:7 say one thing or the other thing, have to yield to the fact that it means both things.

Let this understanding put to rest the notion that Jesus was not really the Son of God until He rose from the dead, that somehow He was born again. When One is perfect and holy and sinless and God Himself, born again is not a necessity. Just another distraction from would-be revolutionaries of thought in the Christian church. We need to turn that dial off.

Jesus was (1 Peter 3:18) "put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit." Already Paul is preaching the Gospel, in his greeting: God

promised Messiah would come. He came. He died. He was raised from the dead. And Paul was called to be a messenger of that good news.

End of first sentence of the book of Romans.

### 1:5

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship...”

“We”? Who is the “we” Paul is talking about here? “We” have received grace and apostleship. Conversion and vocation. Have all God’s people received grace? Of course. Apostleship? Not at all. No one at any time has ever taught that everyone is an apostle. And in the next verse Paul talks about his audience and says “you.”

The “we” is Paul’s humble way of referring to himself, and perhaps other apostles. Notice that same “we” in 3:9: “We have proved already that Jews and Gentiles are under sin.” When did he do that? In chapter one and chapter two. There again the “we” is Paul.

Ephesians 3:8 is a parallel verse to this one. Here he says “we” have received apostleship grace, to bring obedience to the faith to all the nations. In Ephesians he says that grace was given to him to preach Christ among the Gentiles, or “nations.”

“...for obedience to the faith.”

This is Paul’s message? Not “salvation by grace”? At first, the two phrases seem contradictory. But they are the same. When we call people to repent and believe the Gospel, the Good news of salvation, we are asking them to obey God’s invitation, to respond to Him. Our first obedience is believing. Then God lays out a life of obedience, but all led by the Spirit of God that dwells within, not slavish subservience to a written page. The New Covenant works from the inside. But it does work. And to see someone claiming to know Christ but not living a holy life is to see one who is a liar. Many will come in that day with outward claims. Didn’t we



do this and do that? But their lives do not measure up. They *never* knew Him. They were never saved.

“...among all nations for His name.”

Was Paul boasting or at least exaggerating in his claim here? Did Paul go to all the Gentile nations and preach Jesus? Oh yes. Everywhere Jesus is preached and His Word is given out – by Gideons or missionaries or Korea’s Bible women – Paul preaches Jesus. Paul is preaching in many pulpits across our land. These are not our words. Our message is not our own. It is the message entrusted to Paul and his fellow apostles, who became the foundation stones of the church of Jesus.

And there is no replacing these apostles, or re-activating them, or restoring them, or re-defining them. No need to. The original apostles live! Their spirits are alive with Jesus. Their words are alive in His Book. Let no man add or subtract to these foundation stones. Let’s just keep building on what they laid down.

So notice how Paul is not shy in claiming his authority. No man living in the flesh today has this sort of authority. Paul says, I was given the faith. Now obey it. Pass it on. My domain is all the Gentile nations. Which, by the way, includes all you believers at Rome.

**1:6**

“among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.”

Not just all people in Rome. The called people. “Called” in the epistles is the effectual calling, the calling that cannot be resisted, the call of election. You are a part of this select special people, the people of God, a called people. Called to what? Called to be saints. Later in the epistle Paul will say that “whom He predestinated He also called...”

**1:7**

“To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.”

Everyone in the church is called to be a saint. What is a saint? One who has been made holy by being forgiven and cleansed of all sin. One who has been set apart from the world, set on a different path. A new creation in Christ. Sanctified. "Saint" comes from that word.

Under the Old Covenant the Tabernacle was holy. The Temple was holy. So was the Ark of the Covenant, the tribe of Levi, all of Israel, the tithe, the Holy of Holies. But in our day, God Himself lives in us and we become the Holy Place. The saint.

We therefore must differ again with the church of Rome that specifies that a saint cannot be identified until after his death, and, say they, that part of that identification has to be the proof that the one in question worked a miracle or two.

All that is totally foreign to the Scriptural account of saints. It is a tradition of men. We are all called to be saints. And as we will find out later, those whom God calls, He eventually glorifies. All *true* Christians are saints. Now. And forever.

Finally in his greeting comes his standard blessing,

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

As in: 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2. To Timothy, he adds the word "mercy", in 1 Timothy 1:2, and 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4. Then back to grace and peace in Philemon.

The fact that this greeting is not found in Hebrews has caused some to doubt that Paul wrote that epistle. None of that is life changing. What is important about this greeting is its content. Let's look:

"Grace to you." Incidentally, this is the name of John MacArthur's website and media offerings. Here is the theme of Paul's life and ministry. Not under the law, under grace. Moses cannot save you, but grace will. Can't go to heaven by your own works, but only by grace. So I'm sending out

this *grace to you*, I want you to have what I have. Grace was given to me, I am so unworthy! Now may God's grace come to you! The message of grace is spreading everywhere, I want to be sure that this grace comes your way. The bad news is that you are lost forever if you try to keep the law of Moses. You are going to fail! But God has sent His *grace to you* by my preaching and the preaching of the other apostles. Take it, run with it, be saved by it!

And while you are receiving God's grace, take His *peace* too. You can't have peace if you are forever trying to please God by being good. Grace produces peace. They come in the same package and so I offer them to you in the same breath. Peace . Grace. Gifts of God. The war is over. Christ has won. Christ will enter your very person and give you His peace. Receive it!

Notice that grace and peace come from the Father and the Son. But Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, *My peace* I give to you. Not as the world gives." Is Jesus in opposition to Paul? Paul says it is from God the Father and Jesus. Jesus says, I give it.

Anything that comes from the Father also comes from the Son. And the Spirit. There is perfect harmony and unity between Father, Son, and Spirit. He that has the Son has the Father also. You can't divide their persons and their functions. They are so much one that some religious enthusiasts have concluded that they are only one, and not three. No, there is a Threeness in their Oneness. I can't explain it and neither can you, but we can depend upon it: Grace and peace come from the Father and the Son, via the Spirit that Jesus promised and that was poured out on the church at Pentecost.

It was Paul's heart that God's grace and peace would come to everyone to whom he wrote. These are not just words, this was not just a routine. He really meant it!

That is the end of the greeting portion. Now comes Paul's introduction to the epistle, telling us why he is writing it.

## 1:8

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”

First order of business: thank you, God, for the Roman church. Note he is not thanking the church, flattering them. He is thanking God. But it is Paul’s way, in most every letter except to the Galatians, to find something positive to say to his addressee. Now, the Galatians were a different story. They were falling away from Christ, going back to Moses. They needed no commendation but a good wake-up call. He launches right into the letter.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul thanks God for the gifts God has given to that church. In 2 Corinthians, thanks for praying for me. In Ephesians, Paul says he never stopped giving thanks for this church. Philippians: I thank God on every remembrance of you. Colossians. Since we heard of your faith, we always pray and thank God for you. The Thessalonians, likewise, and in the second letter to them, thanks that their faith is growing. His remembrances of Timothy also caused him to be thankful. Same formula to Philemon.

In Galatians, after introducing himself and Jesus, he starts out, “I marvel you are already turning away from the faith!”

Again, Hebrews differs greatly in these opening comments.

Paul was using a time-honored way of dealing with people. Let them know they are loved and accepted before you have to tell them some serious things.

Now, why specifically his thankfulness to the Romans? Their faith has been spoken of throughout the whole world! In 16:19, Paul says their obedience is known to all. Notice that faith and obedience go together. Can’t have Bible faith without obedience or Bible obedience without faith.

MacArthur brings out here that many churches are known for their pastor. Or their architecture. Or their stained-glass windows. Or their size. Or

their wealth. How many churches that you know of are known for their faith?

Throughout the whole world? Hyperbole but true. He would not lie. But consider:

This is Rome. It's the political center of the world. Other churches would have heard about what was going on in the Roman church. Perhaps persecution was strong here in Nero's back yard.

Nero had been Emperor for several years [A.D. 54]. That's the Nero that murdered his own wife and mother, that mercilessly slaughtered Christians, that in AD 64 set the city of Rome on fire and blamed it on the Christians, then persecuted them mercilessly. Reminds one of the barbarity of our own age and of a certain dictator that is now a rock star all over the world, sipping drinks with the Dictator of China while he tries to befriend America's leadership.

So if Christians are being sought out and persecuted in Rome, though only sporadically at the writing of this letter, surely that news was getting to the rest of the church. Paul says, I thank my God for you, for your faith which has led to your obedience in the midst of these trials.

Helps you to understand the serious nature of Phoebe's mission (ch. 16:1), to get a letter from Paul to this persecuted church. Imagine sending one of your servant ladies to Pyongyang to get a message to the Christians there.

The danger was not as great as it would become, but Christians were not that popular. And remember there was a strong Jewish presence there too. Rome's faith in the midst of all its enemies was being spoken of everywhere. Please note that Paul is not being literal but he is being true.

For example, my podcast on sermonaudio is heard around the world! But I challenge you to go to any nation and find someone who has heard my podcast. I have been in many nations, but only by a few people here and a few there. Nothing to write home about.

Rome's story had found an audience in many places throughout the Roman world. And its fame would grow when the real persecution set in.

Not to mention the fact that today Paul's words are literally true!

### **1:9**

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

Macarthur brings out that the Roman church must have had two questions when they received this attention from a great man of God: 1. Why us? 2. Where have you been? He will answer both of those questions in detail. The quick answer: I want to bless you, and I've been hindered in my attempts to visit.

God is my witness. Nearly an oath. Not to be used casually, as many do. But Paul had never met the Romans. Yet he tells them that he is praying for them all the time. He wants them to believe this, though it must be hard to believe. Without ceasing. [note that this does not mean 24/7, any more than "pray without ceasing" for us!]

Always. Again note the truth of the claim but not the exactness of it. Paul will use terms like this to indicate continual prayer. Not 24/7. But whenever I pray, I pray for you, Paul says. I am constantly asking God for a chance to come to see you and bless you. I'm not one who makes his own plans, I must hear from God about this.

Not sure when I will see you, but I keep praying about it, whenever I pray. And when God opens that door, I'll be there. This God that I pray to is the one I serve "with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son."

Sometimes it is difficult to know whose spirit is being talked about when "spirit" is in the text. Here it is clearly "my" spirit. The spirit of man is essentially dead before Christ. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins" says another text.

How dead? Body was alive. Soul, that is the mind, that was alive. But that invisible portion of man that comes to life when God's spirit touches us, that was dead.

Paul says he serves God in his spirit. But of course, that spirit is connected to God's Spirit. It's the innermost holy place of the Christian's being. Out of that spirit/Spirit, Paul served God.

Specifically, that field of service was the Gospel. This was not a vague feeling religion Paul had. His mission was clear: getting out the Good News about Jesus.

How do you serve Him? How do I? In the spirit, or motivated by flesh in some way? Do we look for approval, ease, attention? This is not serving God in the spirit. Do we desire what God desires, and serve Him out of that set of desires? Then we are serving in the spirit or Spirit, actually both.

Once again, MacArthur (p. 32) : "People serve the Lord from many motives. Some serve out of legalistic effort, as a means of earning salvation and God's favor. Some serve the Lord for fear that, if they do not, they will incur His disfavor and perhaps even lose their salvation. Some, like Diotrophes (3 John 9), serve because of the prestige and esteem that leadership often brings. Some serve in order to gain preeminent ecclesiastical positions and the power to lord it over those under their care. Some serve for appearance's sake, in order to be considered righteous by fellow church members and by the world. Some serve because of peer pressure to conform to certain human standards of religious and moral behavior. Children are often forced into religious activities by their parents, and they sometimes continue those activities into adult life only because of parental intimidation or perhaps from mere habit. Some people are even zealous in Christian work because of the financial gain it can produce."

Why do we do the things we do and who do we do them for? Important question. Paul's answer was clear enough. I serve from the Spirit, in my spirit, for the Gospel.

### **1:10**

"Making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."

Making request [in my prayers]. Here is the particular thing Paul has been asking for them: that he might be able to come to them.

He recognizes that when you have a desire to go somewhere and do something, you don't just up and go. God has to arrange it. God has to open a spot in the schedule. God has to provide the means financially. Everything must be put in order for a trip like this, so I've been asking God to come, if it is His will. Notice the phrase "in the will of God."

James says we should always include in our statements about the future, "if the Lord wills." We have no idea what the morrow will bring. I'll come visit you, Lord willing. Let me be sure it is God's will before I come. Because if I don't, it will just be me visiting you, and what you want is God's visit, not just mine.

But look closer. He is not saying, I will sit back and wait for God to send a carriage to my door, to transport me to you miraculously. Notice every word: I'm praying that "I might find a way" to come to you. He will be looking for the opportunity. He'll be trying to work things out with his budget and schedule. He will do everything humanly possible to see them, because his desire is so great to be there. But if the door closes, it closes. If every method fails, so be it.

Remember this was the case at different times in Paul's ministry:

Acts 16:6-7. "Now when they (Paul and company) had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit



to preach the word in Asia [the small Roman province in present-day Turkey].

“After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them...” We find later that God had other plans for them, though their desire to preach in Asia and Bithynia was real.

Human desire is not the only indicator of the will of God, though it can be a starting place. If we place ourselves in the hands of God and ask for His leadership, He will take our human desires and tweak them so that we wind up just where we need to be.

Paul says, I want to be there. I will try to be there. But ultimately I will not be coming unless it turns out to be the will of God. And it was. Three years later, in chains.

What about that little phrase “at last” in the verse? “... now at last I may find a way...” Quite possibly it means just what it seems to mean. “I have been wanting to visit you for a long time, and finally – at last – I am going to be there.” Another thing we can learn from Paul before he even begins teaching in his letter: Sometimes the things we pray for take a long time to see the light of day! We are encouraged to keep praying and keep praying, and *at last* it will happen if we are praying in His will.

Yes, His will is the supreme factor in getting prayers answered. MacArthur: “The popular practice of demanding things from God and expecting Him to meet those demands is perverted and heretical.”

The Scripture is plain, “If we ask anything *according to His will* [not ours] He hears us...”

The church collectively has been praying “Even so come Lord Jesus!” in every generation of its history. And every generation including ours has believed that His coming was imminent, right around the corner, any day now. But it hasn’t come yet. The mercy of God keeps being extended to lost sinners, in answer to our other prayer, “Lord, save the lost. Lord send laborers into the harvest fields and reach the unreached!”

Which prayer do you want Him to answer? Finally, at last, he will answer them both. First one, then the other!

**1:11**

“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established.”

Now we see more of the reason Paul wants to visit Rome. He has the heart of Christ, the heart of an apostle, the heart of a teacher. Not everyone is called to be a Paul, but everyone is given a heart to do certain things for the Lord. We call these gifts. And Paul, with his gift, his heart, wants to impart a gift for the church at Rome.

Notice he does not say “gifts” but “gift.” Notice also he is not writing to an individual, but to a church. The church, Paul said elsewhere, should be desirous of spiritual gifts. Especially the ones that build up the church.

Note one more thing, in Romans 12:6ff. The Roman church seems to have these kinds of gifts already, and Paul directs the Romans as to how to use those gifts. So what is he talking about in the verse before us, when he says he wants to impart some *spiritual gift*?

Whatever it is, we get a clue in the next verse. After saying in verse 11 that this gift (singular) is going to establish them, he explains in verse 12 that he means that through this establishing, they are going to have the same faith that he does.

Verse 15 then may have the answer: “I am ready to *preach the Gospel* to you who are in Rome...”

But you say, they already had the Gospel, too! We know they had the Holy Ghost gifts. We know they had formed a church. We know that it was being persecuted. But when you read the content of the book of Romans you see there was a whole lot that they didn’t have! Not that they were guilty of subverting the truth, or living in immorality. They simply had never had a *full explanation of this Gospel*.

Paul then begins to explain to them in his epistle what the Gospel really means. But before all that he tells them, I am going to come to Rome and preach this Gospel, not only to you, but to many others there. I want you to understand it, and I want you to see it.

And no doubt, while he preached and taught, God would manifest himself in various other gifts. They would be established in the Word and in the Spirit. That was his intention.

Back up one page in your Bible, but fast forward several years into Paul's life, and you read, in Acts 28:30, 31, while Paul is in Rome as a prisoner: "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him [church members, Jews, Gentiles, who knows?] preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ [the Gospel] with all confidence, no one forbidding him!"

Mission accomplished! Desire of Romans 1 fulfilled. Do you see the connection? "I want to impart a spiritual gift..." "I want to preach the Gospel to you at Rome..." Paul "... received all... preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern Jesus..."

Paul had imparted what he wanted to impart: the Gospel! And in the letter to the Romans, received ahead of time, an earth-shattering description of that Gospel which he would show in person when he came later.

Remember when we are talking about the gifts, we are talking about those things which edify, build up, the Body. What greater gift could Paul impart to edify, to establish, this church than the laying out of the Gospel of salvation?

That word "establish", translated "stablish" often in the KJV is worth our attention. Stayridzo. To steadfastly set. To strengthen. I think of a fence post being set in cement. Ever tried to move one of those? It aint goin' nowhere. That's how Paul wants the Roman Christians to be.

I don't believe that he is coming to impart temporary giftings (plural) to this new and vulnerable church. I believe he wants to steadfastly set them, to ground them, to make them unshakeable. That's what happens when a man is filled with the truths of the Spirit of truth that we call simply the Bible. Established. Set in stone. Set on the Rock. Aint goin' nowhere!

For confirmation of what I am saying, I take you to the other end of this epistle, 16:25: Paul's benediction reads, "Now to Him Who is able to establish [same word!] you [how?] *according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ*, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began, but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations..."

Strengthened, confirmed, established, set in stone by the Scriptures. By the Word. By the Gospel. By God's Spirit entering a man and quickening Him with the very words from God about how to be saved, how to live in Christ, how to prepare for glory. Oh, despise not this Book!

Paul finishes his thought in verse 12.

**1:12**

"that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

He equates their establishment with their encouragement, and Paul's encouragement too. The word in the KJV is "comfort". It comes from the word from which we get "paraclete" or comforter, together with a word that means "together". We are comforted together, encouraged together, when you are established. Established in what? In the mutual faith.

This is not just "faith" as an attribute of the Spirit, but "the" faith. The faith once delivered to the saints. The Gospel. The Truth. The Word. I will establish you in this Word and together we will encourage one another. We will come into unity over this.

There's a similar pattern in Titus 1:3-4. Paul writes to this young son in the faith that God has "...manifested His Word through preaching..." and now he sends a letter about it "...to Titus, a true son in our common faith." Not just that we both know how to believe, but the things we share are the things being shared all over the Christian church. One common faith.

One established faith of Jesus. That, Romans, is what I am coming to settle you into. You have received of the Spirit. Wonderful! You are meeting regularly. Great! You are truly a part of the church. Well and good! Now let me tell you the rest of the story, so we can truly be united with a strong common bond.

### **1:13**

"Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now) that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles."

Paul continues in expressing his desire, not only now, but for a long time, to come and see them. This trip is heavy on his heart. The plans were actually in his schedule book. The tickets were bought, so to speak, but every time he actually tried to go there, he was hindered.

I would preach in Corinth and Ephesus and so many others, and God would give me souls, and God would give me miracles, and God would give me precious lives built up strong. God would give me leaders for the churches, disciples for my own cause of preaching, and each time I would say, I must go to Rome now. I want them to know what these other churches know. I want them to experience the power of God in their midst, the joy, the fellowship. Oh I must go to Rome!

But it never happened. Not yet. Paul experienced gradually what God had told him originally, that he was the apostle to the Gentiles. Not a Gentile himself, but one whose specific calling was to go preaching to all the nations outside of Israel. What better place to go, then, than to the capital of the Gentile world, Rome itself?

Perhaps Paul in his humanity had visions of grandeur, or was thinking humanly at times, with human logic. Logically, get the Gospel to Rome and from Rome to the rest of the world, he thought? If so, God had to put the brakes on, and make Rome among the last of his journeys. He would show him how God didn't always work on his own schedule, as He has to show us. And how God considers the kingdoms of this world as nothing compared to the Kingdom He is building around us.

Consider Nimrod of Genesis. He actually founded the cities that would become the headquarters of the two main empires that are the backdrop of the Old Testament, Babylonia and Assyria.

How many verses are given to Nimrod in Genesis? Precious few. Yet multiple chapters are given to the man Abraham. What did he do? Had a son. Isaac. Jacob. Judah... you know the rest. From his descendants came one who will rule the earth, who will judge the earth, who will eventually replace the earth with a new earth.

God doesn't look at things the way we do. Paul had to wait. Rome had to wait. And a great church did come to that city, unfortunately later corrupted by the ways of men.

#### **1:14**

"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."

"I am under an obligation," says Paul [NASB]. Similar sentiments to the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 9:16-17:

"For if I preach the gospel [and I do] I have nothing to boast of [brag about], for necessity is laid upon me [I am under compulsion]; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Then this insight, that helps explain the Romans passage: "For if I do this [preaching the gospel] willingly, I have a reward [as when a man puts in

hours at a job and gets paid for it]; but if against my will [as a slave simply responds to his Master], I have been entrusted with a stewardship.”

In other words, as much as I love you and want to help you, you need to understand that I am going to visit and bless you because God has entrusted me with a message that is for all Gentiles everywhere. I have to come to you one day. I’m under orders.

That includes the educated of the Greek culture we are living in, and the rest of the population too, the foreigners, the non-Greeks, the uneducated. Smart people and total fools, I have to preach this gospel to everyone out there.

### **1:15**

“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.”

Now you understand why I am coming to you. I will do everything in my power to get to you.

Paul had to go to Jerusalem first. To be rejected, arrested, and sent to Rome a prisoner. As he leaves Corinth and makes his way back to the Jewish capital, he says in his farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:22-24: “...I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me... but none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself...”

That attitude would eventually cause Paul to say to the Roman-appointed governor of Judea, “I appeal to Caesar.” Do you think that in that appeal, Paul had had an inspiration from heaven, saying to Paul, “This is the way you will get to see the Roman Christians.”?

He feared no human government, because his super-human Master had given him an assignment, and he intended to fulfill it.

Sure, he knew that Rome was immoral, pagan, steeped in emperor worship. He knew that trouble would meet him there as it had among his own people. But the text here still says, I am ready. And that word “ready” in the Greek carries with it the idea of “predisposition” or “alacrity”, that is “eager”. I’m so looking forward to being with you! Can’t wait. My mental bags are packed. Let’s do this!

### **1:16**

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

[Once more we have a textual variation. The Textus Receptus says “of Christ”, the Nestle-Aland, no. But again not a serious matter. But this explains why your KJV/NKJV have “of Christ”, and other versions you might read, do not.]

Notice in this verse how he comes to the end of his greeting but moves carefully into the theme of his epistle. This letter is about the gospel. Here is Paul’s clear proclamation of what the gospel means to a believer.

First note that he is not ashamed of it. Why does he even bring up “shame”? No one was suggesting he should be ashamed. What could be shameful about this good news about Jesus?

Paul knows the world he is living in. It is the same world in which we live. This gospel, which he will describe carefully in Romans, is not popular. Paganism ruled and rules our world. Many gods. Materialism. Comfort. Pleasure. Self-seeking. Privilege. Success. Political power. Political correctness. Being Accepted. Signs and Wonders. Prosperity. Health and Wealth. To bring up the gospel about a man dying on a tree to forgive you of your sins in the midst of such a culture is very difficult.

But Paul is about to bring it up anyway, and to anticipate the reaction that many will have to the true gospel, he says, By the way, I’m not ashamed of this.



Are we ashamed? In the midst of polite society or even the ravages of revolutionary politics, how easy is it for us to broach the subject? How easily can we start talking to people about some good news concerning a crucified Jesus? How natural, normal, is it to begin a discussion that is so far off the charts of typical human existence, not just in Paul's day, but in our own?

Paul was not ashamed.

As for me, I have been reticent to start such conversations. I love to go to the corner of Lawrence and Kimball, where this is a busy bus and train station, and raise a banner that cuts through the conversations of men and hopefully draws someone to such a discussion. Most people walk on by. I am constantly thinking, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?" How can you see Jesus inviting you to rest in Him, and just ignore it?

The answer for us is simple: they have heard it over and over. And they have been disappointed in the followers of this gospel of Christ. And they have been misinformed about us. And their hearts are hard. But lift up the banner we must anyway. God has a people, and He will call His people through our faithful gospel invitations. We must not be ashamed.

"...for it is the power of God to salvation."

The question implied in this statement is, what is powerful enough to save me? He's writing in part to Jews who depended on the law. But the law was powerless to save, as we will see later in Romans 8:3:

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin..." What did God do? He saved us. Through Jesus, according to the gospel Paul preached. The law was weak, the gospel powerful.

Implied in that last verse is the powerlessness of human flesh to save itself. Look at Jeremiah 13:23,

“Can the...leopard [change] his spots?” You cannot change yourself. You cannot save yourself. You are powerless. But the gospel is powerful. It will save.

Paul uses this same line of thought to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 1:8:

“The message of the cross [i.e., the gospel] is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Look at its apparent weakness. A man dying on an accursed Roman cross is supposed to do away with the sin problem forever? Yes! For the man is no ordinary man, and the death is no ordinary death, for it will soon become resurrection, and he that had the power of death and sin and hell is defeated, as the ancient prophecy foretold.

Yes, that apparent weakness is the very powerful action that saves us forever. MacArthur [p. 53] shares that, through the years, this despised message has brought out the worst of comments and caricatures from the mouths and pens of men. I quote:

“While excavating ancient ruins in Rome, archaeologists discovered a derisive painting depicting a slave bowing down before a cross with a jackass hanging on it...” He quotes one Celsus of the 2nd century warning, “let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible... if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly to Christianity... [they are] the most uneducated and vulgar persons...” He compared them to swarms of bats, ants crawling out of their nests, to frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, and to worms cowering in the muck! God raises up these uneducated, foolish, vulgar worms, and saves them by his power.

Romans 1:26-28 we will cover soon, but take a look at it now:

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are

mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.”

Take a look around the room next time you are in church! Weak, common people saved by God’s power. God’s gospel.

We use the word “saved” and “salvation” as though we know exactly what we are talking about, and as though everyone around us knows, too. What is the word “saved” all about? Money?

Delivered, you say? Like a package? What’s that mean? How about “rescued” or “set free.” Here is where the problem comes in for many believers. They come into the four walls of a church, start liking the people, developing relationships with them, eating together, maybe even eventually make this their church home. Does that make them “saved”?

If I join the church, I’ll be like them after a while... Yes, maybe on the outside.

They may have been set free from loneliness and Biblical ignorance. That is not Biblical salvation. Jesus, the Savior [ another word in the “saved” family that we use without meaning sometime] came to set His people free from sin. Have we been delivered from sin? Forgiven of sin?

Jesus came to set His people free from death, eternal separation from God in a lake of fire with the devil and his angels, the death that is the natural and common consequence of sin.

Everyone on the planet is headed for eternal judgment except the relative few who can say, God has rescued me from that! He has set me free from sin, so I know He will keep me from that awful death. My body will die, but my soul and spirit will go to be with Jesus, rescued! Snatched from the pit!

That’s saved. God may have answered your prayer. That’s not salvation. God may have healed you. That is not the salvation we are talking about.

God may have prospered you, made you rich. Many people in the world are rich. That is not Bible salvation, to be set free from poverty.

Have you dealt with the sin issue? Have you freely confessed to Jesus that you are a sinful man or woman or child, have you believed for your forgiveness, and asked Jesus Himself, through His Spirit, to live inside of you, making you daily a new creation?

Saved. Rescued. Set free. From spiritual death, from Satan, from judgment, from wrath, from lostness, from spiritual ignorance, from your fleshly desires, from false religion. Free. And whom the Son sets free is free indeed! That's salvation.

As MacArthur points out, Epicurus was a Greek philosopher. [Remember the Epicureans of Acts 17?] He said that his philosophy was the very medicine of salvation. That medicine never saved a soul from the wrath of God. But the resurrection of Jesus, that the followers of Epicurus scoffed at, has healed the souls of many.

Seneca, the Roman statesman who lived around the same time as Paul, said that everyone was looking for salvation, that everyone needed a hand let down to lift us up. Right, Seneca. But if you could have discussed with your fellow citizen Paul Whose hand it was that would lift everyone up, perhaps you could have been saved. As it was, Seneca's words were just theory.

I trust that this marvelous truth about salvation is not just theory for us. I'm sure that most everyone agrees with the things I have spoken. But has everyone put them into practice? Or rather, has Jesus made these truths real in our lives? Is sin really the worst enemy we ever faced? Is Satan a liar and a slave-master? Is fear of everlasting punishment not the worst experience we have ever imagined? Then have we been to Calvary, seen Jesus' offer of salvation, and grabbed at it with all our might?

“for everyone who believes.”

Notice this Gospel has no power for one who remains in unbelief. The Gospel and the accompanying grace of God is the means by which an unbeliever becomes a believer. A man is dead in sin. God uses a message about this Gospel to stir the heart, to actually create faith. Yes, look at Ephesians 2:8 again:

“For by grace are you saved through faith. And that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.” The whole package of salvation is a gift. The grace, the Gospel, the faith. God bestows it feely into your soul and you say, yes. Your heart may have been cold toward these things all your life, but now it says, yes. I desire that. I don’t understand why I desire it, but I desire it all of a sudden! I want this Jesus. I want His salvation. I want to be free from sin. Where did that come from? Why the sudden believing when before there was none? The answer: Grace. Faith. The gifts of God.

C. S. Lewis tells of the trip he and his brother took to the Zoo. He thought about spiritual things often, and the ride to the Zoo on the bus was one of those times. His testimony is that when he got on that bus he was not a believer. When he got to the Zoo, he was. God had by His grace resolved the issues he had dealt with, and broke through.

MacArthur says, “God does not first ask men to behave but to believe.” And we must add that He makes that believing possible through His grace.

“For the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

You will recall that when Jesus was here, He ministered almost exclusively to Israel. There were exceptions. The Syrophoenician woman, whom He referred to as a dog. The Roman centurion, whose faith he praised. They received their miracle, as Gentiles have been doing ever since. But first and foremost, to the Jews. Paul, though he knew he was sent to the Gentiles, which means merely the “nations”, still went to the Jewish synagogue in every city, first. He was usually thrown out, but he still felt a compulsion to go to his people.

But also to the Gentile, says Paul? No, it says, to the Greek. Why that word? Paul uses that expression to encompass the entire world outside

Israel. The Greek culture had overtaken the world of his day. Alexander the Great had brought his language and way of life to Egypt, to Asia, to Europe. It was a Greek world. So, to speak of Greeks was to speak of the nations, the Gentiles.

We are suddenly getting into the meat of the book of Romans. At first Paul is speaking to the Romans about a visit he will make. Then he tells them why that visit, namely, to “preach the gospel” there. Now he begins to explain what that gospel is. And without warning we dive into the heart of his message.

I do not believe that Paul had constructed an outline and was working from it. He was writing a letter, and he was filled with the message of that letter. He was a man full of the Holy Ghost, but he wrote letters like we do. We just start writing with a bunch of ideas we want to communicate, and we flow from one to the other. The difference with Paul is that those ideas were from God. What he writes as an apostle is binding on the recipient of that writing. And since the Holy Spirit has seen fit to include this letter in the collection of letters and books called the New Testament, we take his message to our own hearts, as did the Romans. Let’s move to verse 17.

**1:17:**

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.”

The righteousness of God becomes a theme of his writing [35 times in Romans alone!] *The following outline is borrowed, and shows just how replete is Romans with this theme.*

- I. Greetings, Intro, & Theme, God’s righteousness. (1:1-17.)
- II. Condemnation. The need of God’s Righteousness (1:18-3:20)
- III. Justification. The Provision of God’s Righteousness. (3:21-5:21)
- IV. Sanctification. Demonstration of God’s Righteousness. (6:1-8:39)

V. Restoration. Israel and God's Righteousness. (9:1-11:36)

VI. Application. The Behavior of God's Righteousness. (12:1-15:13)

VII. Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction. Why he wrote of God's righteousness. (15:14-16:27)

Here is then the first suggestion of the topic of righteousness which we will visit often. But in it he uses the curious phrase,

"from faith to faith."

Let's look at least at that part of the thought.

*Macarthur* believes that Paul is singling out the faith of each individual believer, using the expression to parallel what he said in verse 16 about salvation being for "everyone who believes." So it is from faith to faith to faith to faith... Not sure that is the strongest view.

*Ellicott* says that it is by faith that we first come to Christ, and it is equally by faith that we continue on in Christ. Thus, from faith to faith. Stronger, I think.

The Greek prepositions are tricky here and can be translated different ways. But in front of the first "faith" is ek, "out of", or "By means of", or "from." So, God's righteousness is revealed to us through the means of faith, as opposed to some work that we do. That much is sure. But what about that second preposition? It is eis, or "into". Let's see if we can put it all together:

God has shown us and given to us His righteousness by simple faith in Him, bringing us into a faith-walk whereby we continue to manifest that righteousness. From the faith of salvation to the faith of daily walking with Him, to the faith of believing God for healing and meeting our needs, to the faith that joins with the hope of our salvation, the receiving of our souls into Heaven itself. It's all a faith journey. We just move from faith to faith to faith and to more faith. That's the road. There are works along

that road, but none of them are placed there to earn God's righteousness, rather to prove that we are living from faith to faith to faith.

"as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

And Paul gives as a proof text of this whole idea of graduating from one faith to another, Habakkuk 2:4. He quotes the second part of the verse, but I think it will be instructive for us to see the whole verse:

*"Behold the proud. His soul is not upright in him. But the just shall live by his faith."*

Take a look at two different men. One is unjust, or unrighteous. The other is just, or righteous. The unjust man is ruled by his pride. He rules himself. He has no other source of strength but what is in his crooked soul. He makes decisions based on his own knowledge and what is good for him. A typical proud man of the world. Habakkuk goes on in the rest of the chapter to describe the ways of proud men. Given to wine. Never satisfied. Power-hungry. Covetous. Violent.

The other man, righteous before God, is alive and thriving simply because of his faith. Along with Paul, the writer of Hebrews in 10:38-39, picks up on this man's description, quoting the very same verse, telling us that the man of faith believes to the saving of the soul. And this is not initial salvation, in the context. This is a man who has been a believer for a long time and who will continue to believe until the end of his life. He will not draw back to his old ways. To give examples of this kind of perseverance of the saints, we have been given the entire eleventh chapter, called by some the "hall of faith."

So, Hebrews follows up the Habakkuk quote with a rollcall of faith, Habakkuk himself with a rollcall of evil. What does Paul do?

Paul uses Habakkuk to show that the Gospel saves people by faith. And that that faith is the substance by which we continue to live. But instead of leading from there to a hall of faith, Paul launches into territory that sounds more like Habakkuk. He will talk about the wrath of God being



released on evil men, the men around us who do not live by faith. Their extended description, in chapters 1 and 2 and some of 3, is among the most depressing in the entire New Testament. But he must show us the darkness before he is able to lead us to the Light. This is a good pattern when telling others of Jesus for the first time, by the way. Get them good and lost, then tell them where salvation can be found.

### **1:18**

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...”

This is the God we love to cover up. A God of wrath? Is He not love? Yes, but His love is a holy love. His wrath is the heart of the surgeon who must get rid of the disease so that the body can live. His wrath is the heart of the gardener who mercilessly tears out the weeds so that the garden can produce. His wrath is akin to the soldier who will destroy all in his pathway who come against his homeland. A Divine hatred goes hand in hand with Divine love. You can't have one without the other. Examine your love of God. Is it filled equally with hatred for sin, disgust with immorality around us, despising of lies?

We are somehow ashamed and embarrassed of a Jesus who cleanses a temple with a whip in His hand. But we know from reading the entire Bible that our God cannot tolerate unholiness.

This is the God who destroyed all but eight people in a worldwide flood. Who melted all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, allowing only one family out. Pharaoh's entire army was drowned in the Red Sea. Pagan kings Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar were all visited with the wrath of God.

God's wrath is not some Divine temper tantrum, like we have when we get overly angry for usually the wrong reasons. Let us not judge God by our own lack of self-control. His wrath is settled, determined, controlled, directed, timed. His hatred is perfect according to Psalm 45:7.

You say, hold on, most of that stuff you are talking about is the Old Testament God. Things are different now. Jesus was all about love, even if He lost it now and then. This is how people think. They see John 3:16 and see only a nice loving God who wants to save everyone in the world. But that's only half the picture. Take a long look farther down the page in John 3, and go to verse 36.

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; [that's the same as verse 16] and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Notice the word "abides". Not "visits", not suddenly attacks. Abides. Lives. Stays. Doesn't move. What am I saying? I'm saying what Scripture says: this world, all of it, is under a huge curse. That curse goes all the way back to Adam. Every man has inherited the disease that Adam and Eve had. Sin is the curse that eventually brings the wrath of God on all except the ones Jesus died to save. What was it the angel Gabriel said about Jesus' name?

"He shall save the world from their sins," right? No, He shall save His people from their sins. A condemned world, out of which comes a community of saved sinners. John 3:18 says the same as John 3:36.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already..."

Pretty clear. Jesus did not come into the world "to condemn the world," verse 17. Sounds nice. See, Jesus is for love. Yes, love. But read on in verse 18, "the world is condemned already". Jesus came to seek and to save that lost sheep here, that wandering soul there. So that the wrath of God will not fall on at least a few of the condemned.

Question. If Jesus bore all that wrath for us by dying on the cross, why do we still see wrath being poured out here and there on the planet now? Do you really believe that Satan acts on his own when there are mass killings, a 9-1-1, a natural disaster? Can't you see the beginnings of the wrath of God about to be poured out in full measure? Yes, the wrath is visible already.

The Bible talks of a time when more evils will be poured out on the earth. Remember, Calvary has already taken place. But in that great Tribulation, we see bowls of wrath being poured out. Where are God's people? I know how some of you answer that question, but even you agree that there are some holy, holy people still here on the earth. Surely if God calls them holy, these so-called "Tribulation" saints, they are covered by the blood of Jesus. What happens to them? Not the wrath of God, but the persecution promised to all His people. Martyrdom. Which is not a threat, but a dear promise given to only the finest of the people of God.

Who are the uncounted multitude John sees after the 144,000 are dealt with? "These are they who have come out of Great Tribulation." Not victims of God's wrath, but court favorites who gave their lives for the Master in the midst of Earth's worst hour.

So what wrath are we saved from at Calvary? The wrath that sin brings on a man eternally in the Lake of Fire. The ultimate blaspheming of the Holy Spirit, speaking against that Spirit of grace that called him to salvation, which call he denied flatly.

That wrath, God is bringing with Him, in Jesus, when he comes. Revelation 19:11-16 reads, in part, "I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him... the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen... followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations... He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God..."

That's the wrath that God's people will be delivered from. Eternal destruction and separation from God, poured out on all the world except the saints caught up to be with Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 says it all:

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but [to the opposite of wrath] to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

The opposite of receiving wrath is being saved, whether we die now or wait for His coming when He will keep us from being destroyed with the wicked. Wrath, for the Christian now, is not persecution, not martyrdom, not trouble or sickness. All those things will happen around us because wickedness keeps increasing, and will increase to the point where a wicked man will finally be allowed to take over this planet.

Then more wickedness, and more wrath, but not on us or for us. Finally, then we will be removed from the ultimate wrath when He comes. As later in the epistle, Paul will say (2:5) "... you [evil men] are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."

Or as John brings out in his Revelation: (14:9-10) "... If anyone worships the beast and his image [during the tribulation], and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God... shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

God has not appointed us to this wrath, for sure.

"...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."

Are these two words synonyms or is there a difference? Both the Greek and the English point out that they are different, yet related. Ungodliness relates, as you might expect, to God. To be godly is to be reverent toward God, a fearer of God, having a life pointing to God. One might call it the "vertical" perfection. Ungodliness would of course be the opposite. No fear of God or His ways, no reverence, a life pointing away from God. A breaker of the first table of the law.

Of course, this ungodliness then overlaps with the other property of fallen man, unrighteousness. Bad character. Bad relationships with others. The "horizontal" part of life as related to other human beings. Breaker of the second table of the law. In case anyone is in doubt as to his particular offensiveness to God, this verse covers it all. Whether you are wrong in

religion or wrong in relationships, God is against it all. His wrath is going to be revealed against it all.

“who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...”

Verses 19-23 will tell us exactly how this process works. Suffice it to say now that every man ever born since Adam has a built-in truth suppressor. By nature, we do not like truth. We do not like light. We prefer to walk in self-deception, believing our way is the right way, or not even caring what is right, but just desiring to stay as we are. Jesus said it in John 3:18-20:

“...he who does not believe is condemned already... and this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed...”

Jesus is the Truth. He is the Light. Men did not and do not like Jesus for that reason alone: He demands change. What most of them don't hang around to discover, is that He produces change by His Spirit. And those who don't hang around and don't seek after Him fulfill this word from Paul and Jesus that evil men – the entire planet, as we will see soon in Romans – suppress the truth. Now let's look a little deeper as to how that happens and why God must react.

MacArthur poses an introduction to these next verses like this (p. 75):

“Many are inclined to wonder if man really deserves such a harsh fate. After all, no person asks to be born. Why, then, they surmise, should a person who had nothing to do with his own birth spend eternity in hell for being born sinful? ...Why is everyone born under God's wrath and condemnation?”

Seriously significant question, with serious answers that begin in verse 19:

**1:19**

“because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”

That’s a strong statement. God has shown all men Who He is? Yes. Every man. Read about the pagans that are mentioned in the Bible.

The Philistines. They believed there was a god and that they should fear him. Remember Dagon? Remember when they had access to the Ark of the Covenant, how careful they were not to offend Israel’s God?

A Canaanite prostitute named Rahab knew that God had already given her land to the Jews.

The Egyptians. Their magicians had power that they thought was from God. It wasn’t, but note their respect for some higher power.

All the pagans have had some revelation of a god. Even America’s pagans who worship politicians and money and power and Hollywood and sports. They know. Deep inside, they know. God has shown them before you first give them a Gospel tract, that Someone somewhere is bigger than they are.

So why don’t they go after this God that they know about? We already answered that: they suppress the truth. In unrighteousness. They take that truth from God and drown it in selfish pleasure. Unless God gives them life through the Gospel, they will remain in their awful state of ignorance, not of God, but of God’s way out.

Sorry, unbeliever, your ignorance is no excuse. God revealed Himself to you by every tree and every mountain and every common-sense thought of your conscience, before you seared it by ignoring it and re-framing it. Without excuse! You knew. You ignored!

Don’t take this as a signal that evangelism is no longer necessary. They know about God but they are condemned because of their ignorance of the salvation truth. We must tell them about the God they ignorantly suppress by their sin. Only then do they have a chance for life.

Remember Paul's approach to the pagans in Acts 17? Let's look at it, through my own shortened paraphrase: 17:22-23.

"Men of Athens, I see you are very religious. As I was looking around at the various objects of your worship, I saw an altar that had a sign under it, 'To the Unknown God.' Incredible. You have been worshiping a God without knowing Who He is. Let me tell you about Him."

And Paul went on to tell them about that God and His Son Jesus.

You see? That's the pattern. Men everywhere know about a god. They may even worship him. But their sinful life represses any truth that starts to emerge. Like, this God is all powerful. Like, This God has demands on me. Like, This God is worthy of praise and obedience. Like, I need to know this God. Like, This God must be angry with us. All this truth just gets backed up, repressed.

Now comes a further explanation of this idea. Verse 20.

**1:20**

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [Divine Nature, Deity], so that they are without excuse."

MacArthur tells the story of Helen Keller's struggle with her teacher Anne Sullivan. There was a point when a breakthrough in communication occurred, and Ms Sullivan began to share with Helen about God. Helen's immediate response was that she already knew about God. She just didn't know His Name. Whether a pagan in the jungle or this privileged, though blind citizen of the free world, everyone knows about God instinctively.

What is it like to know about God and yet not to know His Name? You understand a little of Who He is when you see the majesty of a mountain or a sunset or a rainbow. You witness His "eternal power." Something deep inside says, this God has done mighty things.

The word “Godhead” is a bit foreign to us, but it is easily understood in the Greek. Comes from the Greek word for “God”, *theos*. The word takes several forms, but it simply means “divinity” or “Divine Nature.”

What can a pagan know of God-ness or the very nature of God? Perhaps a pagan hears the anger of God when the thunder rolls and the lightning cracks. Maybe he sees His kindness when a gentle rain waters his crops and refreshes his thirst. Maybe he sees His beauty in the rolling meadows and wispy clouds. Or the wisdom of God as he sees a tiny seed grow into a huge tree. Or God’s love of life as his son or daughter comes into the world through pain and devotion of the mother. Or the cleverness of God as he watches birds fly, then fly away for months, then return, build nests, hatch eggs. Marvels all around him!

It is possible to know many things about this God before the first Gospel message comes your way, if it ever does. It is what you do with that knowledge that matters. If you suppress that knowledge, you will die unforgiven of your sin of rejecting – ultimately – Jesus Christ. But you never heard, you will say, of Jesus Christ. But if you rejected the light you had, what is the chance that you will accept greater light?

On the other hand, when you see this light and you want more, God will find a way to get that light to you. Acts 8 tells us about a man from Ethiopia, an African man, who was seeking God, trying to figure out what these scrolls of Isaiah meant, when God sent Deacon Philip alongside to share the Gospel with him.

Acts 16 tells of a Jewish woman whose heart the Lord opened, to respond to the things spoken of by Paul. Notice the text does not say, that Lydia liked Paul’s message and made a decision to follow Jesus. Outwardly that may have been what men saw. But the fact is, God was behind the scenes, invisibly working on Lydia’s heart.

God promises that if we seek Him, we find Him. There is no place on earth where God will not show up in response to the cry of a seeking man or woman, because God has a people in every tribe and kindred on earth.



He will reveal Himself to His people whom He foreknew. But that gets way ahead of Romans 1.

What we are establishing here is that God has revealed Himself in the Book of Nature. Every man can read this Book clearly, until He represses the message of that Book and re-interprets that Book and allows his sinful nature to blind His eyes to the truth of this Book. All such men – and that is the whole human race - have used their free will to reject God’s offer of salvation. Yes, man does have free will after all. And he consistently uses it the wrong way, except for those few scattered all over the planet that are touched by God and invited to seek Him.

Paul continues his explanation of why all men are justifiably under the wrath of God, verse 21:

**1:21**

“because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful...”

Now when Paul speaks about “knowing” God he is not speaking about an intimate relationship as we have in Christ. We would say “know about God”. They – the human race – knew *about God*, and might have even believed that in a sense they knew Him, simply because of all the wonders of the visible physical world. They had a knowledge of God.

But in spite of what they knew, they did not honor or glorify God “as God.” Knowing that God is great, they did not treat Him as one who was great. They did not thank Him for His greatness. They put their God on a shelf somewhere and went on with their lives. They ignored Him.

Did I say “they”? Paul, writing to Titus, says “we.” Titus 3:3:

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another...”

The tendency of mankind, unless interrupted by grace, is to get worse and worse. 2 Timothy 3:13:

“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” That’s the human race. And Paul is just beginning his description of this depravity of man. Man is without excuse. He knows God but does not glorify him. Quite the opposite. From Donald Barnhouse’s study on Romans, p. 245:

“Will God give man brains to see these things and will man then fail to exercise his will [free will!] toward that God? The sorrowful answer is that both of these things are true. God will give a man brains to smelt iron and make a hammer head and nails. God will grow a tree and give man strength to cut it down and brains to fashion a hammer handle from its wood. And when man has the hammer and the nails, God will put out His hand and let man drive nails through it and place Him on a cross, in the supreme demonstration that men are without excuse.”

We helped put Christ on that cross with our sins. All of us are without excuse and in extreme need of pardon.

We were put here to give God glory. But our text, Romans 1:21, says that we did the opposite. Psalm 29:1-2:

“Give unto the Lord glory and strength! Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

When I had to leave the Pentecostal movement, I left behind some people who know how to glorify God with all their heart. We must learn from them, without being drawn into the false teachings and excesses. Giving glory to God is basic. I Corinthians 10:31.

“...whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

He alone is worthy to be glorified. Look at what He says to Moses when Moses asks to see God's glory. It's like a model prayer from the Old Covenant. Exodus 34:6-7:

"...The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression..."

Look at other instances of His glory. Israel. Wandering through the wilderness. But the glory of God manifested through the cloud that guided them. Exodus 40:34.

"Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

Solomon. Seems that that same glory cloud followed them into their new Temple: 1 Kings 8:10-11.

"... when the priests came out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."

But that glory eventually left Israel and did not return until Messiah came. Even the chosen people rebelled against God and failed to respond in kind to the glory that was being revealed. They got caught up in idolatry and gave glory to false gods, demons.

Enter Jesus. Another chance to see and respond to the glory of God. John 1:14 says,

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father..."

Jesus manifested God's glory in many ways. Miracles. Compassion. Forgiveness. And actual splendor as in Matthew 17:1-2.

“...He led them up on a high mountain... and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.”

Then,

“Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,” Romans 6:4.

Here was the glory of God! And those whom Jesus called out of the world, saw it and believed. Later, and down through history, a few more have believed their testimony and given glory to God. But most of humanity to this day, surrounded by the glory of God’s creation and the glory of the testimony of God’s Word, still refuse to give Him glory.

The creation praises Him: Psalm 19:1.

“The heavens declare the glory of God...” Animals do what they were created to do. Trees and flowers obey His will. But the fallen species, called Adam, will not give him glory or even thanks.

Of course, the people of God are different. They are of a different race, though originally Adamic. One thinks of verse 4 of the classic hymn,

“The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom’s face,

I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace;

Not at the crown he giveth, but on His pierced hand:

The Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel’s Land.”

“but became futile in their thoughts...”

So man suppresses Truth when it appears to the mind. He chooses not to accept the obvious, that there must be a God, and that that God has something to say to him of great importance. He ignores the communications coming to him by nature and common sense. What is left for him to think about?

The vacuum must be filled.

The KJV says “vain in their reasonings.” NASB says “futile in their speculations.” Good to look at the Greek word here, to get a clear idea of what Paul said.

“Vain” or “futile” comes from the word mataois [ma ta yos], and its derivatives, and generally it means empty, profitless, depraved, foolish, idolatrous, senseless. In the KJV it is most often translated “vain.” Let’s look at some verses in the NKJV to see some other possibilities.

Jesus, Matthew 15:9, “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Paul, 1 Corinthians 3:20, quoting Psalm 94:11, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:17, “... if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”

Paul, 1 Timothy 1:6, “Some [people], having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk.”

Paul, Titus 1:10, “There are many insubordinate, idle talkers and deceivers...”

Peter, 1 Peter 1:18, “... you were not redeemed with corruptible things... from your aimless conduct...”

You get the picture. Man as a race turned away from the knowledge of God and filled their brain with futility, vanity, emptiness, idleness, uselessness, ineffectiveness, foolishness, senselessness, depravity. And to this day, the human brain is filled with such nonsense.

Your old nature still has a lot of this stuff running around inside. Beware! But we will definitely deal with that, later in Romans. For now we are getting the picture of a race of creatures that has become idiotic in the universe, vain, worthless in their thinking processes.

“...and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

John 3:18-19 explains this thought more fully: “... he who does not believe is condemned... and this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Here is a blanket statement that also covers all mankind. From the time we can choose evil, we choose evil.

Peter says that the Word that we have is a light that “shines in a dark place.” (1 Peter 1:19) Paul agrees and adds in Ephesians, about the nations [Gentiles], that they have “their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God...”

Matthew 4:16 quotes from Isaiah 9 and says, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.” He is describing the earth just before Jesus, the Light, came into it.

Folks, we are not so bright. Paul said that he knew that in him, in his fleshly carnal nature, there is nothing good. Darkness there, and nothing more.

## **1:22**

“Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

Do you remember your biology class, and the scientific name they give to present-day humans? *Homo sapiens* is from the Latin: “wise man”, the species to which all modern human beings belong. *Homo sapiens* is one of several species grouped into the genus called “man”, but it is the only one that is not extinct. Man’s foolishness comes out even in dictionary definitions of himself.

We have to keep remembering that the persons Paul is talking about are us. “They” is “us.” And every one of us is under God’s wrath. We have suppressed God’s truth about Himself, and filled our minds with foolish thoughts. Thinking we were getting smarter and smarter, we became fools.

We can all recite from the twin Psalms 14 and 53, “The fool has said in his heart, There is no God.”

[Psalm 53 is a revised edition, by David, of his original Psalm. A few small changes, a few directions as to its performance, etc.]

The rest of those two Psalms paint the same picture that Paul is painting of a corrupted human race. We’ll visit them later. For now, we just agree with Paul that men are fools. They try to answer the questions about life, where we came from, why we are here, where we are going, by their philosophies and guesswork. They come up with answers that are far harder to believe than the simple revelations of Scripture.

In their thinking, there once was nothing and then there was something. Somehow. A little spark of life in a mud puddle, and no one is able to say where the water and dirt came from to form that puddle. That spark of life turned into a mass of cells, which divided and divided and turned into a living creature. How the life part was added, we don’t know.

Slowly life forms evolved and evolved, and here we are, getting better all the time. Proof? Look how smart we are! But you can fill a garbage can with Einstein’s theories, Dickens’ novels, Nasa’s accumulated knowledge, and it’s still a garbage can. A dead computer can be filled with smartness. But it is still a dead computer, with no future except what is given to it by man.

And man has no future either, unless given it by God. We think we are so smart, but we are fools. We try to figure things out on our own, and we always come up with the wrong solutions. We don’t know where we came from outside of God. We don’t know who we are, outside of God. We don’t know where we are going, outside of God. Man without God is a fool.

Billy Graham liked to tell the story of two men on a bridge. The one man was about to jump over and end it all. The other man tried to stop him. He said, “Wait, let’s talk it over. You take 5 minutes and tell me why you think jumping in the river is the answer. Then I’ll take 5 minutes and tell

you why you shouldn't jump. So they talked for 10 minutes. And they both jumped in."

Man has no answers. They act like they know everything. They profess to be wise. They have become, and they are still to this day, fools.

For these fools, mankind, God has come up with a foolishness of His own.

1 Corinthians 1:18-21.

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written [Isaiah 29:14] 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise...'... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through 'wisdom' did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe."

Everything is upside down in the world. God says the world is foolish. The world, so wise, thinks our message is foolish. But we know, verse 25 of that same passage,

"... the foolishness of God is wiser than men..."

**1:23**

"and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man..."

Man is very religious. This passage reminds us of the typical religious idol worship of the false religions. We should take a look at that first. But there's another idol worship in the world today, just as evil, just as fallen.

First, the traditional idolatry. It's everywhere. Man is very religious. By the early 1990's the Hindus, for example, had 330 million gods, or about eight gods per family. MacArthur goes on to say (p.89),

"They also revere cows and countless other animals that they consider to be sacred.



A two-inch-long discolored tooth, claimed to have belonged to Buddha... is venerated by millions of Buddhists.”

Do we need to go into the long list of relics and statues worshiped by the Roman Catholic system?

The world is a very religious place. About half the people of the world participate in an identifiable religion. The rest are religious in other ways.

Are things improving? Has man ascended from animism (many-spirit worship) to polytheism (many gods) and finally to monotheism? Not at all. We started with monotheism. Look at the opening chapters of Genesis. Genesis 4:26.

“then began [all] men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

Only one God is mentioned for several chapters. But by the time we get to Abraham, Genesis 11 and following, the world has changed. Babylonia now rules the world, it is 2000 B.C., and Abraham has to be called out of the paganism of his day back to the one God.

Egypt’s many gods are being targeted by God’s plagues in the story of the Exodus. And Canaanite people have to be taken from the earth altogether due to the evil practices of their false religion. Later Israel and Judah will fall into that same idolatry which they at first wiped out.

Isaiah mocks the idolaters of his day: Isaiah 44:9-17 in part.

“[the idolater] plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them to warm himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down before it.

“Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, ‘Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.’ But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for thou art my god.’”

Paul says that man makes an image in the form of corruptible man. While speaking of statues of people here, we understand it can also mean simply, self-worship. You can form a god with your hands, as Isaiah's man, or you can form one with your imagination. You can elevate yourself, as Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and Herod, or as Nero or Hitler or Stalin or Kim Jong Un. Or most of the human race.

When your needs and wants and desires seem more important to you than God's, you have created an idol. And you will serve that idol, whether you bow down or not. God is not looking at your posture as much as at your practice.

"In vain do they worship Me," says God to His people at one point. In fact they are committed to themselves, though they go through all the religious rituals.

Time for self-examination here. Have any of us been guilty of the sin of making an image in the form of corruptible man, an image that looks eerily like me, or you?

Let us allow the poetic words of Thomas Washbourne, 17th century pastor, to speak to us about just how lordly and proud we ought to be. This is based on Psalm 8.

*Lord what is man that thou  
So mindful art of him? Or what's the son  
Of man, that thou the highest heaven didst bow,  
And to his aide didst runne?*

*Man's but a piece of clay  
That's animated by thy heavenly breath,  
And when that breath thou tak'st away,  
He's clay again by death.  
He is not worthy of the least  
Of all thy mercies at the best.*

*Baser than clay is he,  
For sin hath made him like the beasts that perish,  
Though next the angels he was in degree;  
Yet this beast thou dost cherish.  
He is not worthy of the least,  
Of all thy mercies, he's a beast.*

*Worse than a beast is man,  
Who after thine own image made at first,  
Became the diuel's sonne by sin. And can  
A thing be more accurst?  
Yet thou thy greatest mercy hast  
On this accursed creature cast.*

*Thou didst thyself abase,  
And put off all thy robes of majesty,  
Taking his nature to give him thy grace,  
To save his life didst dye.  
He is not worthy of the least  
Of all thy mercies; one's a feast.*

*Lo! Man is made now even  
With the blest angels, yea, superior farre.  
Since Christ sat down at God's right hand in heaven,  
And God and man one are.  
Thus all thy mercies man inherits  
Though not the least of them he merits.*

The poet has said in advance what Paul will be saying in Romans 1, Romans 2, and much of Romans 3. It is a dismal, not a delightful, picture of the human race. It is our own history, and would have been our own future, this lowly base clay creation, but for the grace of God.

“...and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

I freely use MacArthur’s research here (pp 94-95), not his exact words, to give you a partial list of birds, animals, and crawling creatures that the one called homo sapiens has worshiped through the years.

Birds: Rome worshiped the eagle. Israel tried their best to keep the Romans from displaying eagle statues in their land. Egypt: the stork and hawk. Native Americans here worshiped a number of birds, as seen in their totem poles. That’s not innocent artwork.

And don’t be driving around in a thunderbird either. Its name origin was the native American thunderbird. “The thunderbird is a legendary creature in certain North American indigenous peoples' history and culture. It is considered a supernatural being of power and strength.” Or so says Wikipedia. “...a mythic bird that created thunder and lightning. ... this incredible bird that could shoot lightning from its eyes and create thunderous storms just by flapping its wings.” What a great name for a car. (Historicvehicle.org)

Four-footed animals: Egyptians worshiped the bull-god, the cat-goddess, a cow-goddess, a hippopotamus goddess, and a wolf-god. To name only a few. Israelites worshiped, temporarily in the desert, a golden calf. Diana, strangely enough, was not worshiped as a beautiful woman but as an ugly animal, with capacity to nourish the world with her milk. The ancients worshiped mice, rats, elephants, crocodiles, monkeys.

Crawling creatures: In Egypt you will find to this day, replicas of a beetle, sold as a souvenir. This beetle lives in manure piles and was an object of worship. Assyrians and Greeks worshiped snakes. Modern Hindus actually spare certain insects, thinking they might be a deity. Or they might be a human being in transition from one stage of karma to another.

Idolatry in our day? Not just the Hindus and Egyptians. I listed the gods of modern man earlier. Some of them. I left out magic, spell-casting, witchcraft, sex rites, human sacrifice, demon/Satan worship. Our world is polluted and awaits the righteous judgment of God. Let me quote a poem that MacArthur quotes, from one J. H. Clinch:

*And still from Him we turn away,  
And fill our hearts with worthless things;  
The fires of greed melt the clay,  
And forth the idol springs!  
Ambition's flame, and passion's heart,  
By wondrous alchemy transmute earth's dross  
To raise some gilded brute to fill Jehovah's seat.*

He's saying that we can be distracted by most anything from our love and worship and service of God. It's a clarion call to obey John's directive: "Little children, keep yourself from idols."

**1:24**

"Therefore God also gave them up ..."

Therefore. The wrath is coming. We deserve the wrath that is coming. Why? Well, men knew the truth of God and suppressed it. They could see His attributes, but they ignored Him. They did not glorify Him. They were not thankful to Him. They thought they were so wise, but were really fools. They began worshiping, but not God. They worshiped likenesses of God's creation. They worshiped themselves and the works of their hands. That's why the wrath is coming.

Therefore, because of all they did to displace God, tear Him from His Throne, therefore, God gave them up.

"Them". Who? All the way back to v. 18 for the answer: "... men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. All men."

Three times, vs 24, 26, 28 Paul mentions this fact of history. God gave them up.

Gave them up. Abandoned them. *Paradidomi*. To surrender. To yield up. That is, to entrust, to commit. To transmit. You see the idea?

Paul uses the word elsewhere when he talks about giving up your body to be burned. Of Christ giving Himself up to death. Luke talks about how Paul committed men to prison. Same word. Jesus said, make nice with your enemy or he will deliver you to the judge. Same word. Peter talks about angels who were delivered to chains of darkness. Jesus, says Peter, committed Himself to the Father instead of answering His tormentors in kind. Jesus, says Paul, was delivered up because of our offenses.

Put it all together: Transferring of someone or something from one state to another state. In this passage we learn that God looked at all of mankind, early in His dealings with them, and said, I now transfer you from My tender loving protecting care, to your own devices. You want to be free from Me? You are free. Go for it. I give you up to yourself.

We humans all imagine we would love to be truly free to do anything we want any time we want. That is disastrous thinking, and gives us... the present world, that has freely given itself over to the rule of Satan, the prince and power of the air.

See what happened? God creates, blesses, reveals Himself. Man says no thanks, takes the reins himself and hands them over to the Prince of Darkness.

“...to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts.”

God is holy, pure, clean. If you are released from Him, you become unholy, impure, dirty.

When God gives you over, you may think you're getting away with things, but you are not. Your sin finds you out. You thought it was safe sex, but you acquire any number of diseases in the experiencing of it outside of man-woman marriage. The children come and you raise them like the children of hell that you are, and they become a curse instead of the blessing God intended.

Alcohol and drugs turn out to be just what God said of them. Substances that come back to bite you. You gain more sickness, early death.

You want to be unclean and watch the filth of Hollywood, feeding your mind on the cesspool rather than the Scriptures. You will become what you eat mentally.

And speaking of eating, let's not forget gluttony is still a sin. Eating too much. Eating foods that are known to hurt the human body, all of this brings its own reward.

But humans want to be free. Then be free. Be dirty. Do whatever your little lustful heart desires. Enjoy your life away from Father's care. Liberty.

But know, said Solomon, that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. God is angry with the sinner every day. Not all of God's wrath is future. Judgment is built into disobedience. And this abandonment will only get worse after death. Just as the Christian has only a foretaste of Heaven here, so the unbeliever has only a foretaste of hell here.

How often have you been to an unbeliever's funeral, and heard, "Well his troubles are over now. He had it hard here, with his AIDS, with his Diabetes, his liver trouble, but now He will be happy and healthy, and Daddy-God will just love on Him forever."

No. Adam's race has been abandoned to itself. Its judgment begins here and multiplies there.

Mankind took the blessings of God and turned them into something evil,

“to dishonor their bodies among themselves...”

Look at the progression downward. You can tell where a nation or a person is in his descent into evil by just reading this passage. First man suppresses the truth about God. He does not glorify or even thank God, the true God, for anything. He fills his head with vain empty thoughts. He boasts of his wisdom and becomes a fool. He enters into full-blown idolatry. God responds by allowing him to respond to himself, not to God. Then he starts the slow self-destruction of his own body.

The dishonoring of the human body is a sin. God made the human body and said, “That’s good. I like that.” Anything done against the body is done against the will of God. Substances taken into the body that shorten the life-span, whether smoke or drink or drug, say to God, “I don’t honor this body as you honor it.”

Gluttons are not exempt here. Over-eating is a Western sin, one that cannot be committed by huge portions of the world’s population. But we can commit it, and do, regularly. Over-consumption of sugar and other otherwise good substances, is offensive to God and dishonoring to the body. Christian! Get a hold of your diet! Stop making the same mistakes the world makes! Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Honor it!

But although I speak “a” truth here, it is not “the” truth, the full truth, of this passage. First a look at the words translated in the KJV, “between themselves.” They dishonored their bodies between themselves. NKJV, Amplified, Rheims, New RSV, and others say “among” themselves, which is essentially the same.

The NIV has it, “the degrading of their bodies with one another.” The NAB says, “the mutual degradation of their bodies.”

Trouble is, the word that is translated “between” or “among” is the little Greek preposition *en* The basic meaning of which is “in.” A few have left it just that way. And maybe we can lump together anything that harms the body here.



But combined with “themselves” there seems still to be the suggestion that this is a mutual problem, that is, a sexual one. Not something we do by ourselves, but with assistance from another human being, we dishonor God’s creation.

Sexual sin will be definitely indicated in the next level down (verse 26). Probably here, too, but perhaps, here, in what we would call normal sexual behavior, but outside of marriage. That is, fornication. adultery. Sexually, this is the first step away from God’s plan.

1 Corinthians 6 is the parallel passage. A simple reading of verses 18-20 puts all of this into perspective:

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body [ Romans says “dishonors” his body. Same idea. ]... your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit... you are not your own... you were bought... glorify God in your body...”

So man descends. Now he is harming his own God-given body. Paul next tells us a little more of how this all came about:

#### **1:25**

“who exchanged the truth of God for the lie...”

Notice here that the sentence continues from verse 24. “...God gave them up to uncleanness... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie...” Who did God give up? The ones who had the truth, but believed the lie.

What truth? The truth they suppressed, verse 18-21. The truth about Who God is, His invisible attributes that were clearly seen in nature. Here, instead of “suppressed” Paul uses the imagery of “exchanging”. Like going to God’s store and saying, Here, God, I don’t want this truth. Let me exchange it for a lie.

Trouble is, there are no lies in Heaven for God to give out. They had to get those lies, verse 21, through the futility, vanity of their thoughts, through

their wild imaginations. And of course the father of lies was present and putting those lies out there within reach of humanity.

This pattern continues through the course of history. God gives truth, Satan says, "Is that really true?" and man questions and searches out other "truths." Look at Jeremiah 13:25. God's own chosen people fell from truth and God says to them,

"... you have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood."

It's in the church of our day. Christian leaders are exchanging truth for the lies of our culture. MacArthur tells of an advice columnist who was asked by a sincere Christian, How can I deal with these sexual desires and still hold on to my Christian faith. The inquirer was in a relationship and was hoping for some tips about self-restraint.

The columnist had a Christian counselor on her staff and referred the question to her. Her advice, "Such decisions are up to each couple to make for themselves... sex in a loving relationship is all right without the sanction of marriage."

How many people hearing such advice will immediately conclude that their relationship is not loving? No, they'll hear what they want to hear from men, and exchange the truth of God for the lie. The lie: You are your own person. Do what feels right and good. The truth: You were bought with a price. Glorify God in your body. Keep that body for the one man or woman that God has for you.

Truth is difficult to obey, but eventually easy to enjoy. Lies are easy to follow, but eventually difficult to digest. Mankind over the years, says Paul, wanted the lie, embraced the lie, and in so doing,

"...and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Paul has already brought all this out in verse 23. Nothing new here, except that last part, "Who is blessed forever." Where did that come from?

MacArthur suggests that Paul is coming up for air! He's been talking for a while now about the evils of men, how they do not glorify or thank this Glorious Creator. Paul decides that what they won't do, he will do, right here and now!

As though he were saying, I don't care what the world thinks about my God, I know He is blessed forever and I'm going to say so! A wonderful break in the flow of things. But, armed with that light, we have to descend a while back into the darkness that continues and gets worse in verse 26.

### **1:26**

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions..."

What is about to follow in the text is referred to in various translations as "vile affections", "degrading passions", "shameful affections", "shameful lusts". The Greek word, *ah-tee-mos*, is the opposite of the word *tee-mos*, which means "honor". Put an alpha in front of many Greek words, and you have negated it. *A-timos* is dishonor. Despised. Reproachful. Shameful.

What follows in the text is different in degree from what has preceded, in verse 24. Uncleaness, fornication, sexual immorality outside of marriage, other sins against the body, all bad. But we're taking another step down. A big step.

Affections, passions, even desires. Those are neutral words, like religion, personality, etc. They can be good or bad. Sexual relationships in marriage, man plus woman, very good. God approves and wants this for all but a select few of His people.

But affections can be vile, degraded, dishonorable. Men can turn away from God's usage of the gifts He gives. He can get bored with the Divine plan. He goes outside of marriage. That does not satisfy, so he seeks more satisfaction in perverted lifestyles.

Trying to be human, “up with people”, mankind becomes dehumanized and twisted in his thinking. Thinking he is progressive, mankind degenerates.

The vileness Paul is about to describe has been with us for a long time. In America we were spared for many generations from a serious outbreak of it. In my lifetime it has come from a closet sin, hated and/or ridiculed, to the law of the land, celebrated in parades and rallies, protected by the legal system, the media, and by a fearful populace who dare not speak against it for fear that they will be accused of a hate crime.

Let’s go on record. We do hate what God hates. And God hates sin of all sorts, including this one.

In Canada, some have been arrested for speaking out against this. Cases are in our own courts now to decide just what are the rights, not of the gay community, *but of the non-gay community*. Suddenly the Biblical standard is being asked to justify itself, instead of the anti-Biblical people being asked to do so.

This is what happens when God gives up mankind, and allows him to seek his own devices.

Next, a shocking statement, for some:

“... for even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature...”

Shocking, not because we find here that women are involved in lesbian relationships, but because they are mentioned first. Commentaries look at the word “even” and conclude that Paul is mentioning the females first for this very shock value that I mention.

But in fairness we must say that “even” is a word that should not have been in the text. There is a Greek word there, but nowhere in the New Testament is “even” a translation for that word. Someone was trying to make a smooth understanding for us.

Actually, *te* is a little particle word that is used together with another *te* later in the sentence, and should be translated “both... and”. Both the women and the men perverted the use of sexual relations.

You’ll see that in most translations, the *te* is not translated at all. Simply, “for their women exchanged etc...”

Once more humanity is showing up at God’s store, as in verse 25, and asking for an exchange. Hey God, we aren’t satisfied with this male-female thing. Can we trade it in for something more to our liking? After all, we were born this way. After all, “one size fits all” won’t work in the 21st century. After all, a person has to seek out his own identity, be his own person.

God says, sorry, don’t have what you want here. But I transfer your order to the other store in the heavenlies. Satan will give you what you want. What you want is against nature. I created a natural world in perfect order. All the animals reproduce after their kind, via male + female. All the creatures that went on the ark, went two by two, male + female. Nature works. Your ideas don’t work. They are unnatural, harmful, sinful, devilish. I have destroyed whole cities, toppled empires when humanity sank to this level. I will do it again.

How bad is it in my country, or what used to be my country?

Gary J. Gates, UCLA School of Law, April 2011

*Drawing on information from four recent national and two state-level population-based surveys, the analyses suggest that there are more than 8 million adults in the US who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, comprising 3.5% of the adult population. In total, the study suggests that approximately 9 million Americans – roughly the population of New Jersey – identify as LGBT.*

*Among adults who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, bisexuals comprise a slight majority (1.8% compared to 1.7% who identify as lesbian or gay); women are substantially more likely than men to identify as bisexual;*

*estimates of those who report any lifetime same-sex sexual behavior and any same-sex sexual attraction are substantially higher than estimates of those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. There are also nearly 700,000 transgender individuals in the US. An estimated 19 million Americans (8.2%) report that they have engaged in same-sex sexual behavior and nearly 25.6 million Americans (11%) acknowledge at least some same-sex sexual attraction.*

One out of every 9 people you meet leans this way? Add to this the growing numbers of the population who approve. Add to this that this report is conservative and seven years old.

### **1:27**

“Likewise also the men...”

Of the 3.5% mentioned above, about 1/3 are women, 2/3 are men. But the “likewise” ties it all together to let us know that initial gender is not the issue. Men and women are capable of this sin.

“...leaving the natural use of the woman...”

No need to be specific here. We know what Paul is talking about. And let us be reminded, that even “the natural use” can be sinful if outside of marriage. Homosexuals need to be told by us that we are not singling out their sin as the only sin, but Paul does indicate here that it is sin, and seemingly a progressively worse sin as he moves on in the chapter.

“... and burned in their desire toward one another...”

Macarthur suggests that the “burning” level of this sort of man is rarely known among heterosexuals. He cites the incident at Sodom, and the constant need for satisfaction of these twisted men.

He states that in the United States and other Western countries, homosexual men may have as many as three hundred partners in a year. The bizarre often occurs, and mutilation is common, says a 1967 book by Marshal Houts.

Forensic expert Dr. Milton Helpert, not a believer, has performed thousands of autopsies. When he sees brutal multiple-wound cases in a single victim, he knows who is involved. "Burning" is a good word for Paul to have used here. I could find no other place in the New Testament where it is used. It means to "inflammate deeply." In English terms that means "to excite to excessive or uncontrollable action or feeling..."

Homosexual action was punishable by death under the Old Covenant. No unrepentant homosexual will enter heaven, says the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and other places).

"... men with men committing what is shameful..."

"Shameful"? Did Paul through the Holy Spirit say shameful? Then why do we see parades called "Gay Pride"? Why does a Catholic-leaning (though probably not officially approved) gay organization call itself "Dignity"? From their statement of position:

*We believe that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex Catholics in our diversity are members of Christ's mystical body, numbered among the People of God. We have an inherent dignity because God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism, making us temples of the Spirit, and channels through which God's love becomes visible. Because of this, it is our right, our privilege, and our duty to live the sacramental life of the Church, so that we might become more powerful instruments of God's love working among all people.*

So if you are a part of the creation, you deserve dignity. Christ died for you. Baptism saves you and makes you a Temple of the Spirit. This is Arminianism gone amuck.

God says your lifestyle is shameful. You say it's worthy of dignity. Someone is lying. It's you. But your lie has proved God's truth here in Romans 1 (verse 21). People who suppress God's truth become futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts are darkened. They profess to be wise and dignified, but are foolish and full of shame. Only the grace of God or the judgment of God will release men from their lying spirit.

“...and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

All sins against the body produce judgment against the body. Smoke long enough, drink long enough, over-eat long enough, pour in sugar and chocolate long enough, your body will eventually be unable to sustain you.

Sexual sin has even greater consequences. Venereal diseases for the fornicators, AIDS for those who burn for other men. From the Center for Disease Control:

*In 2014, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men accounted for 83% of primary and secondary syphilis cases where sex of sex partner was known in the United States. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men often get other STDs, including chlamydia and gonorrhea infections. HPV (Human papillomavirus), the most common STD in the United States, is also a concern for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. Some types of HPV can cause genital and anal warts and some can lead to the development of anal and oral cancers. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men are 17 times more likely to get anal cancer than heterosexual men. Men who are HIV-positive are even more likely than those who do not have HIV to get anal cancer.*

We do not appeal to gay or straight men or women to have safe sex. Or to be concerned about disease. We must call on them to repent, to be delivered from this unnatural shameful lifestyle, and enter into a godly way of living through the power of God’s Spirit and His Word.

**1:28**

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...”

I think the word “since”, which is justified in the Greek, and fits the transition of the English, is better here. “Since” they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. It’s that way in several translations.



Not liking to retain God in their knowledge takes us back to verse 18 which talks about suppressing the truth. God reveals Himself to mankind. He, through nature and common sense, man's own brains, places a knowledge of Himself inside man. Like placing a container in the refrigerator.

But man doesn't want that container in there. So he reaches in and takes it out, and replaces it with a container of vain imaginations. After a while, God allows those imaginations to take over, as He withdraws His offer of knowledge of Himself. Then comes the idolatry. Then comes the fornication. Then comes the degradation of homosexuality. But wait... there's more.

"...God gave them over to a debased mind..."

Remember the word *timos* and *atimos*, "honor" and "dishonor". One little letter in the Greek changes the meaning of a word to its opposite. Same here with "debased." "Reprobate" in the KJV. "Depraved" in other translations. The Greek word is *adokimos*. And as you have guessed, its opposite is *dokimos*. And that word means "accepted" or "approved."

So God, having given them over first to shame their bodies, now turns them over to a mind that is totally unacceptable in Heaven, and on Earth. MacArthur points out that this word is used of metals that are rejected by refiners because of impurities. "That's unacceptable, get rid of it. To the trash heap!"

This isn't a mere discrimination between good and bad. This is ultimate rejection by a holy God. "I said I am holy. You must be holy like Me if we are to continue together. But when I give you the choice, you choose the impurities, the evil around you. So go the rest of the way. Let your mind just be filled with all the sin that's possible. See where it leads you. My Spirit will not always strive with you. You are your own, body and soul, now."

Tragic, tragic thought. And what do we have? Read the news. Every day, all day long. Criminal man getting worse and worse.

“...to do those things which are not fitting...”

KJV has it, “convenient.” One of the many KJV words that have long since changed their meaning and cause confusion to modern readers.

“Convenient” today means “suited to personal comfort or easy performance.” I went to the store down the street because it was so convenient.

Webster says that the old obsolete meaning of “convenient” is just what the Greek text tells us: suitable, proper, appropriate. That’s why the New King says “fitting.”

And Paul has already told us several things that a debased mind will cause someone to do. When God has released you from Himself and His plans for your life, you have nothing but the fallen human nature to rely upon, and you will do some very bad things.

But wait! There’s more. So much more! There now follows a catalog of the sins of man over the centuries. He’s going somewhere here. There were people then and people now who still did not see themselves in what Paul has outlined so far, the very grossest of sins. Not wanting to leave these people out, he shares the rest of the story...

#### **1:29**

“...being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness...”

It seems to me that these are not the first in the list, but a title over the list. “Sexual immorality” is not in more modern versions, following different Greek texts. But he does mention it in his lists in 1 Corinthians and Galatians. And need we say that he has definitely covered this subject matter quite well in the letter so far?

Another reason the translations follow a different Greek text here is that “unrighteousness” and “wickedness” seem to cover the rest of the list in a general way, and “sexual immorality” has already been covered.

Regardless, following is a sample of all the unrighteous deeds men have committed. He is not saying that every man commits every vice, but collectively this is our pedigree. This is who we are. Stand by. Here is the darkest portion of the chapter, if not the whole letter.

And by the way, don't cover your ears. Because you are now in the book of Romans. Your sin has found you out. You can't get out of this chapter unscathed, un-convicted.

(You will see later that the Word does not do this to condemn you any further. You are already condemned. When God shows you your sin, you are being blessed. The next thing He shows you is the Saviour from sin!)

"...covetousness.."

Boom! Got most of the audience already! Ever wanted something you didn't need? Ever visited a home and said, "Sure wish I had that"? Covetousness is the national sin.

It's the Greek word pleonexia (accent on "i"), from the basic idea of "more." (pleon). Not satisfied. I want more. More stuff. More attention. More satisfaction with life. Greediness is the other way it's translated. Scripture says, "Having food and clothing, let us be content." But we're not. We want more.

Isn't it striking to you that covetousness is one of the ten restrictions God gives His people from the days of Moses? By the way, it is only one of the restrictions, not two, as the Catholic grouping has it. By putting commandments one and two together, they come up with only nine commandments, so they divide the tenth one into two. Voila! Ten commandments again.

But coveting, grouped together with adultery and murder and idolatry? People who want more are unhappy people. Always saying, "Well, once I get my raise, things are gonna be OK." Or, "If I only had married that other woman, I wouldn't be so messed up now." Yes, you would. And so

would she. "Once I get out of school and start a respectable job, life will be good."

Not that "more" is an evil word. Tracing that same Greek word, pleon, I see Paul becoming all things to all men, that he might win more. More souls for Jesus, that's good. I see that Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. More praise to Jesus, that's good. The church at Thyatira had more works now than before, and they are praised. More love for and working for Jesus, that's good.

But more for me? How do I dare ask for more, when I have been promised eternal life with Christ? What more is there? The more of covetousness. Beware of it!

"... maliciousness..."

Malice. We don't use the word that often. It means worthless. Depraved. Related to malignant. Now, that sounds familiar. A tumor, a cancer, that is so far gone as to be untreatable. Imagine a sin within mankind that is so far gone as to be untreatable, making the man worthless. Deep, deep evil. A conscience that is so seared that nothing touches it. No compassion. No caring. How can prison guards in Communist countries beat pregnant women until their child either dies or is deformed at birth? How can abortionist practitioners in our own nation vacuum out the remains of a live baby, the take the body parts and sell them to research labs? Hitler was malicious against six million Jews? Yes, six million people slaughtered because of their racial identity. How cruel, how senseless.

At least we live in a righteous holy nation? Since Roe V Wade, sixty million lives have been snuffed out by men calling themselves doctors. Innocently. Legally. Inject the poison, suck out the remains of those unwanted pregnancies. How long can a nation be spared that kills its own children?

That, among many other American and human atrocities, is the very definition of "malicious." If you wanted to know...

“... full of envy...”

*“painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.”*

That person is pretty. I wish I was pretty like that. That person is smart. I wish I had a brain like that. That person is holy. I wish I had that person’s holiness.

Notice the subtle difference between envy and discipleship, in the church. What? The disciple wants to be like the teacher. Matthew 10:25, “It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher...”

The disciple patterns his life after the Master. He sees holiness and goes after it. He sees patience and desires it. He sees love and craves to be more loving. What’s the difference?

Motivation.

Envy wants things to gain an advantage for self. To be liked. To be accepted. To be lifted up. To be the center of attention. If I only had what he/she has, then they would praise *me* like they praise him/her.

Christian Discipleship, following a Master or Teacher, wants to glorify God. It sees rotting carnality within and abhors it. It desperately cries out to be more like Jesus, not to gain an advantage over Jesus or to be praised of men, but to obey God when He says, You will be holy, because I am holy: a promise, not only a command.

Envy wants to build me, but is frustrated in that attempt, because I can only copy external attributes of someone else, I can never be that person.

Discipleship, by the Spirit, creates an altogether new *me*, in the image of Christ. And one day when He comes, we will be like Him altogether.

To guard against envy, be filled with Him, and you’ll be satisfied with who He is in you.

“... murder...”

In a 2010 listing of murders worldwide, I found there were nearly half a million. From human Cain killing human Abel we have advanced to half a million humans killing half a million humans. Largest number? Brazil. 50,000. India, 43,000. USA “only” 15,000. Close to 500 homicides were here in Chicago. Chicago is less than 1% of the US population, but accounts for 3% of its murders.

That was all in one year.

Murder is not just a number. It’s an outgrowth of anger and hate, and Jesus pronounced all such people as murderers. Jesus did not lighten the load of the law. He increased it. Made it unbearable. Made it so hard that you must cry out for mercy. And when you do, from the heart, you will be saved. And not until.

“...strife...”

That’s “debate” in KJV. Another word that needs clarification. Debate, polite discussion, sharing differences of interpretation, opinion, as long as this is done in love, is not a problem for Christians. But the Greek points to quarreling, wrangling, contention, fighting. We all know the difference. Unfortunately, one can lead to the other, and with this, God is not pleased. Most of it stems from pride, and the desire to be number one, unassailable, perfect, correct.

Matthew 12:19, quoting the prophet, says that the One Who is coming will not strive. Same word.

But wait. Didn’t this same Jesus, meek and lowly and humble, strive with the Pharisees? Aren’t we to contend earnestly for the faith? Aren’t we to persuade men to come to Christ?

People who are of an inward nature to begin with will use Paul’s mention of “strife” as an excuse never to get involved with any disagreement of any kind, and just let the world go by...

What's the difference? Where do we draw the line? Back to motivation.

Why must you win this argument? Will it save a soul? Are you snatching a soul from the fire, as in Jude 23? Is this the last chance you will have to save your dying relative? Is this doctrine of the church something that is obviously Biblical, and must you challenge the false teacher now and strongly?

Or is your entrance into the discussion merely to show your stuff? How bright you are? How much you learned in college? Or worse yet, what you learned in the Bible itself? In proving your Biblical point, are you proving Paul's also, who said, "The servant of the Lord must not argue?"

Can we ask ourselves in those heated moments, Where is this going? And why? And when we get there, will the Kingdom of God be benefited? Will we win a battle and lose the war?

Strife, arguing, contending, in this prideful way, is a sin, one of the many of man's pitfalls, and it can lead to other sins. Beware. Church, don't be intimidated by the man who always wins arguments. Only proves he knows how to argue well, not that he is right or in the right spirit.

"...deceit..."

Liars. They lie to themselves. They lie to you. "You are of your father the devil. He does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me."

Why do we have trouble convincing people of the truth? Because they are liars. They believe the devil's lies, and your truth seems like a lie to them. Only those who have been visited by the grace of God will hear you.

"...evil-mindedness..."

Malignity. Evil dispositions. Bad character. This person is just bad. Even the world will look at him and recognize, this is bad. This is evil.

*From CBN News: A young American couple was brutally murdered by alleged ISIS terrorists while biking along the Afghan border.*

*Jay Austin and Lauren Geoghegan quit their jobs last year and commenced a journey to see the world by bike. Austin wrote in his personal blog that he was tired of his ordinary life and wanted to see the beauty of the outdoors.*

*"I've grown tired of spending the best hours of my day in front of a glowing rectangle, of coloring the best years of my life in swaths of grey and beige. I've missed too many sunsets while my back was turned. Too many thunderstorms went unwatched, too many gentle breezes unnoticed." he wrote. "There's magic out there, in this great big beautiful world."*

*The couple went on a 369-day trip that took them from Cape Town, South Africa, all the way to Tajikistan. While in Morocco, Austin wrote on his blog that evil does not exist.*

*"You watch the news and you read the papers and you're led to believe that the world is a big, scary place. People, the narrative goes, are not to be trusted. People are bad. People are evil. People are axe murderers and monsters and worse...I don't buy it. Evil is a make-believe concept we've invented to deal with the complexities of fellow humans holding values and beliefs and perspectives different than our own," he wrote.*

*Tragically, on July 29, the couple and two other cyclists were stabbed to death by terrorists on the Tajikistan/Afghanistan border.*

*CBS News reported that, "ISIS followed an initial claim of responsibility in print with a video showing the five purported attackers pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi."*

No, sorry, there is evil, and it dwells richly in some people in this world. What possible motive could these men have for taking the life of some cyclists on a holiday? Malignity. Cancer. Rotten thinking.



“...whisperers...”

Translated “gossip” in newer versions of the Bible, and defined as “slander” by Paul. It is the employment of the human tongue to destroy someone you don’t particularly care for. “But I’m not gossiping, I’m just telling you the truth.” Yeah, how would you like it if I told everyone the “truth” about you.

This cowardly person is never given a microphone. He or she “whispers” this “truth” into your ear, to get a response, maybe even to get the reward of your shock and surprise. The most outrageous of these gossips are the ones that say they are telling you this “truth” so you can “pray” about the poor person. In your mind what you are often doing is placing the object of your venom lower than yourself.

*Did you hear he was seen with her in the supermarket. And she, married all these years! Her poor husband.* And the story builds from there. Some who have nothing more to do with their lives than talk about others all day need to have surgery to remove that phone from their ear and hand, for they have become addicted to talk. They need a life. Maybe a job.

The pastor can probably find some work for you to do around the church if your only employment all day is talk.

The whispering game, remember it, “Telephone”? I whisper into your ear, “Bobby has green socks,” and you must turn around to the person next to you and pass on the message. But you didn’t hear it correctly, and you pass on, “Bobby plays with green blocks,” then it becomes, “Bob lives around the block,” and “Bob left the door unlocked”, then “Bob left for Florida with his flocks,” and “Stop leaving floors un-mopped,” and so on...

Funny when it’s a game, but deadly in the mouth of a gossip. James says “The tongue is a world of iniquity... it defiles the whole body... it sets on fire the course of nature... it is set on fire by hell...” (James 3:6) Your little “prayer request” can turn into a scandal that will destroy a person’s life, even the life of a church. Keep your information to yourself. We don’t want to hear it.

If you suspect evil, go to the person, or to the pastor. Don't tell me, I don't want to know. In old Italy we say, "keepa you mouf shut" ... or something like that.

### **1:30**

"... backbiters..."

The list continues in verse 30. "Backbiters" conjures up a strange image in our mind. But not far from literal truth. While a man's back is turned, snap! That's what vicious wolves do, I presume. They might be afraid to confront a man head-on, if the man is there to defend himself. But let him turn around for a moment...

The various translations seem a little confused over this word. The word translated "whisperers" in verse 29 actually carries with it the idea of "slander." Yet this word in verse 30 is translated "slanderer" in many versions. And it means to "talk against" or "defame." To accuse. To harm someone's reputation. It would seem that this word is a bit more intense, at least from the English viewpoint.

Whispering is one thing. Planting subtle suggestions in someone's ear and allowing that thought to be interpreted and passed on. Your typical church gossip from busybodies who aren't too busy...

Biting is another thing. Cruel and vicious and public statements meant to harm and damage and kill. During days of persecution, one sees otherwise "good" church members turning on their brothers and sisters, to protect themselves. Even this sin is found among us.

"... haters of God..."

We see it in our culture now, more and more. Men who do not want to be ruled by anything but their own passions. They know what God demands from them, if He is there, and they do not like such a thought. They learn first to ignore Him, then resent Him, then hate Him. One day they will try to kill Him. Oh they were successful at Calvary, but when He returns, the

gentle Jesus meek and mild will have become the Lion of Judah, and all their hatred will be turned into cringing fear.

Any haters of God among us, in the church? I think not, but beware those moments, those thoughts, when we say in our heart that His ways do not seem to be fair, when we “reply against God” as though we have a better way of doing things. Beware of bitterness against God for the loss of friend or family or health or wealth. Beware of blaming that can turn into a smoldering resentment.

Hebrews says it best: (3:12) “Beware, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin...”

Let God examine us, former sons of Adam, and remind us that Adam’s nature lurks in us and needs to be crucified daily.

“...violent...”

KJV has it “despiteful”. Other versions: insolent, contumelious. When a variety of words are used, our only solution is to go back to the Greek. And the Greek word means “to exercise violence.” It is translated elsewhere, “to treat spitefully.” And our word “despite” comes from the idea of “despising.” So while the KJV gives the motivation, the NKJV rightly suggests the action that comes from that motivation.

These haters of God must also hate, despise, all of God’s people. For some, it is a part of their religion to despise/hate/be violent against, followers of Christ. In the eyes of Islam, for example, Christians are “infidels.” That is, heretics from the Truth, worthy of death.

A man who leaves Islam for Christianity is given this prescription in the Koran: “whoever apostates among you, from his religion, so he will die as an infidel.” (2:217)

There are peaceful verses in Koran, and warlike ones. This is because Muhammad lived in peace at first, then had to defend himself. His “god” changed his mind about violence when it was necessary, then came up with a “law” that covered such doublemindedness, called the “law of abrogation” which basically states that if Allah wants to change things in his book, he can, because he is god. But that study is for a different time.

We were talking about violence.

Nowhere in Scripture are God’s people of the New Covenant told to be violent against unbelief. The strongest thing we are allowed is excommunication, which delivers a man living in sin to the outside world, away from the protections that are inherent in church membership.

Paul said that this by itself could lead a man to have his body destroyed, but not by the church.

The later Roman church, alas, didn’t see it that way. It is true that the Church itself did not burn heretics, but delivered them to the “secular” arm. But the result was always the same. If the government was told by Papa that this man was a heretic, the government took immediate action. Romanism was responsible for the deaths of many of God’s finest, and those responsible will pay a price for it.

God’s intention in excommunicating is repentance and restoration, not execution. Not violence.

Rome stopped executing when the world around it became powerful enough to intervene. But she will do it again when permissible. Islam continues on wherever it is feasible. And other religions.

Violence is built into us. What did you do when you could not get your way? Tantrum? Yelling? Worse? If you could have gotten away with it and still kept your reputation...? Be aware that this is part of the genetic structure handed down from Adam. It started first with Cain. False religion, rejection by God, jealous of true religion and acceptance with God. Anger, hatred, violence. Beware.

“...proud...”

Self explanatory, yes? Maybe. Maybe not. *Huperephanos*. The prefix *huper* means “above”. *Phanos*, an appearing, or shining. “Appearing above” others. Seeming to be above others. But not really above them in God’s sight. A feeling of superiority. I’m better than you are.

I think that if we asked most people in the room if they are proud, they would say, no, not me. Which might tell you something. If people don’t think they are proud, they must think they are humble. Which means they may be proud.

Pride is a tough one to deal with. When our family members do something special, we are “proud” of them. Especially when a person who wasn’t expected to do anything worthwhile, suddenly does something worthwhile, we say, “I’m really proud of you.” Right away we want to say, well, there’s a good pride and a bad pride.

Safer to say that all pride is bad, and this other thing we do is something other than pride. When you are happier about someone’s else’s achievements than you are your own, that’s a form of love, not evil pride. When all you can think about is your own achievements, you are proud.

And sometimes, that “pride” – which isn’t pride - of a family member starts to deteriorate into something selfish. My son is on the honor roll. What’s wrong with your son. Now it’s ugly pride.

Are we to be “proud” of /happy with, our own achievements? Depends on why you did it. The Pharisees did all that they did to be seen of men. Paul tells us that whatever we do, we are to do to glorify God.

So why did you teach that lesson, sing that song, give that offering, clean the church bathroom? Totally out of love and the glory of God, or was there something vain about it? Something that was hoping for a little reward, a little attention?

Pride still goes before destruction. A haughty spirit before a fall. We may not see your inner motivation. Even you may not see it fully. But the next time you are before the Lord, ask Him to examine you fully. "See if there be some wicked way in me," the Psalmist said.

Why do I do the things I do and who do I do them for? In our context here, will the church be blessed by what I do, or just me?

Some people pray in public because they like the sound of their voice, and they assume everyone else does. For some, public prayer is their entire prayer life. Some pray to inform God about things, like He doesn't know what's going on. Some pray because they want to preach, and they give you a little sermon every time they pray. The Pharisees prayed long vain prayers too, and Jesus called them out.

Others pray because they know that God is going to hear and answer them and the church is going to be blessed because of it.

Remember the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem? Donkeys don't think human thoughts, thank goodness. They are not a fallen race, though one donkey in Scripture talked.

This one that brought Jesus was quiet. But people have tried to imagine what he might have been thinking, if he had been given a brain like ours:

*Oh look at this crowd! They've all come out to honor me. Look, they're cutting down branches of trees and laying them on my pathway so I don't have to walk on that dusty road! They are shouting something. Don't know the language, but it does seem they are very happy with me. They're jumping up and down! What a wonderful donkey I must be!*

In the church we have one job. Bringing Christ into the city. Our little city here, and the city outside our doors. People will say, good job, look at you! You pray so well, you give so sacrificially, you sing and preach like an angel. Fools will respond, whether outwardly or in their hearts, "Yes, it was a pretty good thing I did, wasn't it," and go off into foolish pride. And

all pride is as foolish as a donkey receiving the praises that belong to Jesus Christ.

You who try to encourage your brothers and sisters need to remember how to word those encouragements, too. Anything that would possibly lift that brother or sister into pride is a dangerous word. Be careful. Pride destroys individuals, and churches.

“...boasters...”

To boast or rejoice in God and in good things, that's acceptable to God. But this word is talking about the proud man who can't keep his pride to himself. There are people who are very proud, but you don't always know it, because they know how to keep it quiet. The boasters know no such hesitancy. They're great and they'll tell you they're great. They are difficult to have a conversation with, because all they want to talk about is number one. They'll never ask about you and your needs, or if they do, they'll immediately start relating your response to something they did one time... You know the type.

This word is only used twice in the New Testament, and comes from a Greek word that means “vagrancy.” Wanderers. Moving from place to place. The only connection to travel I found in other commentaries was the idea of “swaggering”. Walking with obvious pride. So stuck on themselves that wherever they wander, they bring the message of their awesomeness.

“...inventors of evil things...”

Ingenuity can be a good thing. Creativity. Inventing. New ideas for ways of getting things done. All good.

But in the human heart there is the capacity for inventing evil. New ways to hurt God and man. The Nazis were well-known for their ingenious ways of experimentation. Many, many, sad stories are told of their inventiveness. They learned new ways to torture human beings, all in the name of science.

In mid-1942 in Baranowicze, in occupied Poland, experiments were conducted in a small building behind the private home occupied by a known Nazi SD Security Service officer, in which "a young boy of eleven or twelve [was] strapped to a chair so he could not move. Above him was a mechanized hammer that every few seconds came down upon his head." The boy was driven insane from the torture.

Ah but we have advanced. We are not like those insane German people driving others to insanity, right? No, today, we take little children that have not been born, kill them, then boast about how safe the procedure is... to the mother: From a 2009 Journal Watch (NEJM publication).

*Historically, surgical abortion required sterile metal instruments for manual removal of the pregnancy [a living child!] from the uterus. Even in skilled hands, this process often was fraught with risk for maternal infection, injury, or death. Since the introduction of vacuum suction [invention of evil], surgical abortion is considered to be among the safest procedures in medicine [for the mother, not for the child], with an overall mortality rate in the U.S. of 0.7 per 100,000 procedures.*

*Two types of vacuum suction are available: manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) and electric vacuum aspiration (EVA). MVA is quiet, requires no electricity, and can be used for pregnancies [children!] of 5 to 14 weeks' gestation (however, for gestations [children!] beyond 10 weeks, most clinicians opt for EVA). The procedure can be done with local anesthesia, conscious sedation, or general anesthesia and typically requires less than 10 minutes to perform.*

This is part of what Paul meant when he talked about "inventors of evil things."

"...disobedient to parents..."

We do not shrink back in horror when we discover that children are disobedient. It's in the DNA of Adam. His wife was disobedient. He was disobedient. His son was disobedient. And there's a long chain of disobedience that follows in every family on the planet. It's not



disobedience that should shock us, but today, the response to disobedience is shocking.

We have entered a lawless age. Lawlessness starts in the home. With the breakdown of the family, whether Dads are gone, or two men or two women are in charge, or schools promoting godless lifestyles, lawlessness abounds.

It is a society like this, magnified to a universal degree, that will give the antichrist, the man of sin, the lawless one, a platform, a place to easily incorporate his program against the laws of God. He will find little opposition because, in my view, this spirit of lawlessness will have permeated not only the world but the church.

I'm saying that in an increasing number of homes throughout the nation, anything goes. Homes are upside down. Where before the parent gave out the rules and the children were made to obey them, now the children, blinded by the god of this world on TV and Ipad and smart phone and internet and all the rest of the enemy's ways of getting in to small minds, the children come to their parents with demands. And the parents better meet them, because the world-crazed friends of these children put incredible pressure on them to conform.

Christian schools are somewhat better for children, but they too can get sucked into the world's orbit.

Thank God for parents, usually Moms, who are able to school their own children in the home, teach them the ways of God, demand obedience, and form their children with God's structuring.

If a plant, let's say for example, a tomato plant, is not restricted, it just grows any old way. The branches fall to the ground, the tomatoes come out and are eaten by insects and squirrels. Restriction, which seems so unloving at the time, is rewarded later.

But caution! Restriction, and obedience is not equal to salvation. Restriction most of the time, means your child will not be the

neighborhood pest, will not wind up in jail, will not destroy his body with evil substances.

My step-father discovered I had tried cigarettes and punished me immediately. Never tried that again. It wasn't that pleasant anyway, to smoke.

Restriction, even in a non-Christian home like mine, kept me out of a lot of trouble. But it did not save me. For that I needed grace that came through neighbors and church members and friends who told me of Jesus. The ultimate answer for that disobedient child is Jesus. Even those who have been raised in unruly godless unrestricted lawless homes, many years later can experience grace.

But I'd rather live next door to a family that restrains its children. I'd rather meet children in the supermarket who have been trained. You've seen the other kind. What an embarrassment.

### **1:31**

"...undiscerning..."

In the NKJV, all five of these descriptions of fallen man begin with "un" : undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. This sounds good linguistically, and even matches the negative prefix on each word in the Greek, but it will probably be better to follow the KJV and the actual English meaning of the Greek here, because some of these items don't sound as awful as they really are.

So, what's so bad about being undiscerning? Or as in the footnote, "without understanding"? Can a man be blamed because he might not understand something properly? Basic meaning: "unintelligent." Again, what's so bad about that?

The word is translated "foolish." There are people who are unintelligent for a while, but they gain knowledge and then they are wise. But we're talking about people who are willfully stupid. Deliberately ignorant of God

and His ways. Again, that idea of suppressing the knowledge they have, and inventing their own system of intelligence which God calls foolishness.

Is it a sin then to be undiscerning of the ways of God? Yes. If the ways of God are out there to be learned and you don't learn them, your continued ignorance is not an excuse, it's a condemnation. Even pagan King Nebuchadnezzar was smart enough to say of God, "Everything he does is right and all His ways are just!" Job talks of people who turned from following God and had no regard for his ways. David says Godly people do no wrong, but follow His ways. Let us who are of the Light seek for more and more Light in His Word and among His people and in prayer. To be ignorant is a terrible thing.

"...untrustworthy..."

Covenant breakers. "Perfidious" is the older English word. "Traacherous" defines the Greek. Can't keep their word. Promise breakers. The result of their action is basically lying. Do they mean to keep their promise at first? Don't know. But they don't keep it. You can't trust anything that comes out of their mouth.

Might start out with little things. "See you at 10." But "10" turns into "11" or later or not at all. The habit is formed. It says to anyone who is listening, "Don't trust me."

It can get worse. "I promise to uphold the Constitution of the United States." Do you really? What happens when the pressures of office get to be too strong and enemies rise against you? Will you still keep our Constitution, or just your interpretation of it? Somewhere along the line, somebody didn't keep the rules. Our country today is not what our Founding Fathers envisioned. Freedoms have been eroded. Someone broke his promise.

We promise in marriage. I'll love for better or worse and everything in between. Unless someone prettier or nicer or richer comes along. And the courts agree with us now. Even the church agrees. You guys can't get

along? No problem. You made a mistake. God will forgive, move on with your life.

That was not God's plan. Men and women have become promise-breakers, covenant-breakers. How shall these people be trusted to keep any promise in the future?

You see why this evil in the heart of man is listed here. It reveals that man is in love with himself. If being somewhere at 10 o'clock will fit his schedule, he'll be there. If not, no. If upholding the Constitution makes him popular and get along with people, fine. If not, don't count on it. If that marriage partner is meeting all of his or her needs, then viva la romance. If not, I'm gonna hit the road.

You can trust humans in one area only, and that is that they will honor number one over all the other numbers out there. Thank God for Jesus, who showed us how to honor others first.

"...unloving..."

KJV is closer to the truth here, "without natural affection", hard-hearted toward kindred is the implication of the Greek. *Stergo* is to cherish affectionately. *Astorgos* is the opposite, in adjective form. From the creation, humans were made to cherish themselves and those closest to them. Mothers especially have this very normal natural affection. The bond is so strong that sometimes even good things can't break it. But it is normal.

Paul says that fallen man isn't like that as much. Over the course of time, men's hearts, even women's hearts, have become callous, and uncaring about people, even their own flesh and blood. Hence, abortion is on the rise. And homes are fatherless, as Dad goes off to greener pastures and cares not for the ones he leaves behind.

We talked about abortion. Let's talk about those absent fathers. Do they know the trouble they are causing by leaving? From a blog online that featured a piece on "the fatherless generation":

*63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) – 5 times the average.*

*90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the average.*

*85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average. (Center for Disease Control)*

*80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes –14 times the average. (Justice & Behavior, Vol 14, p. 403-26)*

*71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report)*

*Father Factor in Education – Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.*

*Children with Fathers who are involved are 40% less likely to repeat a grade in school.*

*Children with Fathers who are involved are 70% less likely to drop out of school.*

*Children with Fathers who are involved are more likely to get A's in school.*

*Children with Fathers who are involved are more likely to enjoy school and engage in extracurricular activities.*

*75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes – 10 times the average.*

*In Christ, a father can be reequipped to love his children and his wife as he ought to.*

*“...unforgiving...”*

*Or “implacable”. The Greek means “without libation.” A libation is the pouring out of water in an ancient sacrifice. It later came to mean simply*

drinking ceremoniously when making a truce, an agreement. "I'll drink to that." So the deal is sealed.

But the person Paul is talking about is just the opposite, as all these five in this verse are opposites. I'm not drinking to that. We have no agreement. Even if I drank to it once, you broke the covenant yourself, I'll not drink to your words anymore. You trespassed. You're done. Get out of my life. You'll never lie to me again. You'll never hurt me again. I cut you off.

Men justify their unforgiving habits in a number of ways. Of course, in the light of God's forgiveness, there is no justification for us to be unforgiving. And in fact, if we are that way, our own forgiveness is stalled. "Forgive us our trespasses, just as we forgive those who trespass against us." A serious prayer that should bring us to repentance every time we pray it.

"...unmerciful..."

Last in this awful list of Paul, but equal in evil to all that have been mentioned, the quality of being unmerciful. Not just withholding mercy, but lacking mercy altogether. Merciful is full of mercy. Unmerciful means there is no mercy there. The ultimate result of an ever-hardening heart. No mercy.

us me of *Lo-Ruhamah*. Ring a bell? Hosea chapter 1. God tells Hosea to marry a wife of harlotry and have children by her, as a picture of God bringing forth fruit in an evil nation. And the very first child born of that Hosea union is to be called *Lo-Ruhamah*, "No Mercy."

God says, "I'm done with Israel." I had mercy for them all these years, from their complaining ways in the wilderness to their idolatry in the land I gave them. Seven hundred years of mercy. But no more. I'm done. Take them out of my sight, Sennacherib of Assyria. Take them away.

No mercy is an awful thing. No more forgiveness. No more answered prayers.

But only One Person has that right of no mercy. And that is the One Who gives and forgives and loves and has patience and waits on his people with a tender kind hand. Only one.

When puny man says to his fellow-men, “Lo-Ruhamah”, no mercy, he must be a hardened fool. What, after all God has done for me, after all the good things I have received from men and from nature and from within myself, I will not show mercy?

The judgment of God rests on such a man, and on the men who have committed any one of the acts mentioned in verses 29-31. Oh, and they did one more thing.

### **1:32**

“who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death...”

Paul is still talking about humanity as a whole. The human race. How did/does humanity know the righteous judgment of God? How do we know that those who fall into the above sins are worthy of death?

The answer: conscience. Paul will talk of it more in the next chapter. I quote MacArthur:

“In most societies of the world, even in those considered uncivilized, most of the sins Paul lists here are considered wrong, and many are held to be crimes...”

It's built into the human mind that certain things are right and certain things are wrong. Goes back to Adam and Eve, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When they partook of that forbidden fruit, evil became a part of their thought processes. That was passed on to their children and on down to us.

Cain was punished for his evil.

The entire earth was wiped away in the flood, and that story was passed on. People know. And that includes every man woman and child today. To greater or lesser degree everyone has a system of right and wrong built in. It's inescapable. We know there are punishments for everything bad we do. That's why this last thing that man did and does may be the worst of all:

"...not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Approve? Oh my, they celebrate. The most spectacular local example of this is the Gay Pride Parade. And you thought it was just Chicago.

Wikipedia lists parades like this all over the world:

In Africa: Mauritius, South Africa, Uganda.

In Asia: Hong Kong, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam.

Europe: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom.

In North America: Canada, United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico.

In the Pacific: Australia, New Zealand.

In South America: Brazil, Argentina.

I calculated the top fifteen events in various cities, their estimated participation. Twenty-four million. Yes, our Chicago was in that top 15, with a million. Sadly, so was my home city of Columbus, Ohio, with an equal number. The only larger ones were in New York and of course San Francisco. Worldwide, Madrid is the hands-down favorite of the Gay Community. In three separate events they were able to attract nearly one-third of the total, eight million.



Back to the US, 177 cities will have events. And in 31 of those cities, there will be multiple events. Five times in Chicago you can celebrate this abominable behavior. Well over two hundred times in a calendar year, mankind in my country alone will be shaking their fist in God's face and saying, "We are proud of what we have become without you and your Word and those churches and those preachers. We're doing it our way!"

This is what happens when man suppresses the knowledge of God and God gives the human race over to itself.

Notable in its absence, by the way, is any mention of an Islamic nation or city, in this list. To enter into this sin in those nations is to die a cruel death. Could it be that just as God raised up pagan Babylonia and pagan Assyria to destroy His own once-holy but now idolatrous people, Israel, God is going to use these warriors of Allah, a pagan god, to come against once-holy America?

Make America great again? Maybe. Better, make America holy again, or the handwriting is on the wall. Those who are looking to Donald Trump as their Savior may be in for an awful surprise.

## **2:1**

"Therefore..."

Since men suppress the truth, and not just a few men here and there, but all men everywhere; and since the entire human race has been given over by God to its own ways, which are universally evil; and since all of humanity is involved, not only in sinning, but in boasting about its sinfulness, therefore...

"...you are inexcusable, O Man..."

Note that Paul is still addressing all of mankind. There are many groups, who, reading this first chapter of Romans, will say, well that doesn't apply to me, though I surely understand what you are saying. There's surely a lot of evil people in this world, but bless God I never sank to that level.

Oh yes you did. And you're proving it by that proud attitude.

Jews, you not only had nature and conscience like all men, but you had the very Presence and written words of the living God in your midst, and you eventually nailed Him to a cross.

Gentiles, you knew, but in every nation, you sank lower and lower in your filth until God had to let you go.

There are people who sit in every church service of every church across this land who smugly try to separate themselves from the words of Paul, but if they are human, Paul's words come to them: Inexcusable.

"...whoever you are who judge..."

Condemn. In words or in thoughts how often have we sat in judgment on those around us. How we love to focus on a bad quality of another human being, and talk about it to our friends.

"Did you hear about that murderer in the school shooting? What an awful man! I could never kill innocent people..."

"Oh, John has left Judy, again! That poor woman. I could never be unfaithful to my spouse!"

"Look at that Pope! Covering up the sexual sins of his priests! How can he hold this high office and be so evil in his heart? I could never accept a position like this and be so evil secretly."

"Look at that TV preacher, will you? Why, just sell his house and you could feed the poor of his city for years! I could never use God's money this way."

"Oh these gays, they make me sick! I could never love someone of my own gender. It's so perverse."

“Killed her own baby, in her own womb, oh how did she do it? Abortion is so evil. I could never take an innocent life so routinely.”

“That politician is just a liar! How can he stand before his constituents and pretend to be helping them when all he does is tell lie after lie? I could never lie like that.”

That is what judging looks like. Condemnation of others’ sins with the assumption that we ourselves are without sin, or at least, without that sin. Every one of the sins I have judged in these imaginary judges’ mouths are worthy of judgment by a just God, for sure. But not by me. The moment I start judging, condemning, another human being, I need to hear from Paul...

“... for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”

Let’s revisit the imaginary cases:

You’re going to judge the murderer? True, murderers are in danger of the judgment, Jesus said. But didn’t Jesus, in the next breath also say that angry people are in danger of the judgment? Doesn’t murder start in the evil heart of man with anger, resentment, envy, jealousy? If you condemn all murderers to hell, haven’t you condemned yourself?

Note here, Paul is still talking to mankind, not the church specifically. He is trying to make people see that they are sinners, equally guilty before God. So, I will pretend that I am talking to the world also.

But we in the church are especially needy of a lesson on judgmental attitudes. Though our sins are forgiven, we have sometimes adopted a proud attitude over it.

Then there is the sin of adultery. Proud man judges others who have been unfaithful visibly. But oh if we could see the thoughts of the heart of these men! How many adulteries take place in the minds of men and women every day, every hour? The Bible talks about people whose eyes are full of

adultery. But see them in church, upstanding citizens of the congregation, happily married, visibly. Then see them later going to their stash of porno literature, leaving their wives a hundred times in one day.

And excessive spending by TV preachers? None of your business. Let's look at your own budget. Let's look around your house and your garage. Did you really need all of that? No, then you are guilty of covetousness also. Sell those things you don't need or better yet, give them away. Who told you that you could have just whatever your little heart desired, and that you were to become the judge of others who overspend?

Hurt by the inroads of the gay community, are you? You know the Bible calls these practices abominations, right? Actually, the Scriptures have a long list of things that are abominations to the Lord, not taking away from gay abomination of course. Proverbs alone talks about how the proud are an abomination to the Lord; a false balance, and diverse weights, that is, a cheater, are an abomination; lying lips; the very thoughts of wicked people; a scornful person; and a person who turns away from the Scriptures, even his prayer is an abomination!

God wants you to hate sin, judge sin, in your own life. Now after that task is done, if you still have any time left, maybe you can start on the sins of others. When you are constantly harping on the sins of others, the condition of humanity, you start feeling more and more righteous. Proud. But when you cry out to God as the publican, "God be merciful to *me*, a sinner," only humility follows.

Paul Stookey of Peter Paul and Mary, started singing Christian songs exclusively after the trio broke up. This one says, partly in the words of Jesus, and with a little lighthearted approach, what I'm trying to say.

#### PEACE IN THE VALLEY

Well there'll be Peace in the Valley,  
Peace on the mountain too,  
Before you tell a man he's got a splinter in his eye,  
You better pull the log out of you.

There's a pigeon of peace in my backyard,  
He's the wrong kind of bird but he tries so hard,  
One day I told him he should have been a dove,  
He cocked his head and looked at me with love and he sang

chorus

Remember the time the painted lady in town  
Came to church to lay her burden down?  
The preacher turned his back, the room was filled,  
And the words that she spoke, I remember them still  
She said...

chorus

So, if you meet a man in a pastel suit  
With an alligator Bible to match his boots  
You might not like his style too much  
But if he could reach a soul you could never touch  
You gotta say...

chorus

## **2:2**

“But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.”

We cannot judge. But God can. And will. Who is the “we”? Paul and the other apostles were Jews. The Jews and the Christians to whom he was writing knew the truth, the obvious truth. Man is sinful, every man. And God has the right to judge man for his sins.

Many men, maybe all men, have something inside that says, it's OK, everything's going to be all right in the end. God, if he exists, is too merciful to send anyone to hell.

But Paul disagrees. He says that truth allows, even demands, that God judge sin. Even the Gentiles, back in verse 32, knew that God's judgment was righteous, "that those who practice such things are deserving of death..."

I've just said two opposing things. Did you catch it? Inside man feels everything will be OK. But man knows he deserves to be punished. That's the conflict of the human heart. That is that suppression of the truth that man is forever engaged in. He knows what is right, he does the wrong; he knows he is guilty, but he thinks God will just overlook it because he is so nice.

We who are saved must be clear in what we tell others. God will rightly judge those who practice the things mentioned in Romans 1. He will.

### **2:3**

"And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Paul is relentless. He takes no prisoners. Everyone must come under this condemnation. There are people who have set themselves up as judges in the world, sometimes in the church. They are in positions of authority, or think they are, and their business, like the Pharisees, is to look down on everyone else. They judge this sin, and that sin, and the more they judge others, the more confident they feel about their own standing with God.

In Donald Barnhouse's contemporary version of this verse we read, "You dummy- do you really figure that you have doped out an angle that will let you go up against God and get away with it? You don't have a ghost of a chance!" Barnhouse himself goes on, emphatically,

“There is no escape. Do you understand? No escape- ever. And this means you – the respectable person, sitting in judgment upon another fellow creature, and remaining unrepentant yourself.”

Hypocrites will get double judgment, for being doubly guilty. They didn’t see their own sin, and they saw everyone else’s.

We said there is no escape. But of course, there is one. Receive Christ, who bore all your sin for you.

MacArthur tells the story of a powerful tribal chief of a nomadic tribe in ancient Russia. Russia had its native inhabitants just as we did. This chief ruled because of his great strength and his utter fairness and impartiality. During a period of time in the tribe, a rash of thefts broke out. The chief promised ten lashes to the thief if he was discovered. No discovery. The chief grew angry and now promised forty lashes from the tribal whip master.

This chief was by far the only one in the tribe who could bear such a beating. It would be a death sentence for anyone else. And then there was a discovery. The chief learned that the thief had been his own mother.

Would he rule by love or by law? What a crisis. He decided on both. His mother was brought to the place of public punishment. She bent to receive the first of the forty lashes. But just as the whip was coming down, he placed his body on her frail one, and took the beating he had sentenced her with.

There is an escape from the horrible judgments Paul is predicting. Jesus took your punishment Himself. The forty lashes. Crucifixion. Shame. He is the escape.

This bit of good news as we go back into the difficult legal case Paul is bringing against humanity.

**2:4**

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness...”

Paul is still addressing hypocritical judges here, and in much of the chapter. In Paul’s thinking, and we believe he is being guided by the Spirit, this judging thing is very serious, worse than all the sexual perversion he mentions in chapter one. It is the blindness of the Pharisee.

Mankind is so unaware of the love of God. Have you considered lately the riches of His goodness? His *crestotes*. His moral excellence, whether speaking of His character (goodness) or His demeanor (kindness). Roll it all up into one. Because God is good in Himself, He is kind to us. How?

He made us a planet. A stunning universe. A body that could delight in it. A job to do. A purpose. And when we stumbled, He provided a way out of the darkness we created. But men “despised” that goodness. This is not the despising of hatred, rather it means to “think against.” To esteem lightly.

God is good. God is kind. But I am my own person. If He wants to be good and kind, let Him, but don’t let Him bother me. His goodness and kindness is not that important to me. Anyway, good and kind people are weak people. Give me a tough hard person that I can relate to. Oh, you’ll get that Person. If you despise His kindness long enough, the other Person will show up in your life.

Macarthur turns to Hosea here, and I follow him there, in one of my favorite passages of the prophets. Listen to a Daddy talking about His kid, to whom He was so kind and good (Hosea 11:1 and following):

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son... I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms... they did not know that I healed them...”



See how it works? God is good and God is kind and we lightly esteem His goodness. Forcing Him to punishment: ... the Assyrian shall be his king because they refused to repent.

“...forbearance...”

Mankind has also despised the forbearance of God. Forbearance is the holding back of judgment. Longsuffering. As MacArthur says, like a truce. The war is not over, but I’m stopping hostilities for the moment. North and South Korea, you must know, are still at war. But there’s been a decades-long truce, which either side can break at any moment.

In humanity’s case, we break the truce constantly. We despise, we lightly esteem this incredible power of God to take abuse from us. We assume that God’s holding back means everything is OK now. God has gone soft. It’s all been swept under the rug.

Then a bomb drops, or a destructive hurricane comes, and we realize God is trying to get our attention, letting us know that his forbearance won’t be forever. That if we do not repent, we will all likewise perish.

“... and longsuffering...”

What is the difference between God “holding back” and God being “longsuffering” or “patient”? This last word has to do with the length of both of the first words. He is kind for a long time. He is good for a long time. He holds back for a long time.

“...not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

I love to tell my own story of an answered prayer, when I was a little boy. I knew nothing of God and salvation. But I did know that I missed my daddy. He was gone and I wanted to hear from him. He seldom called and

when he did, it was to talk to my sister. I never understood until a couple of years ago why I was not favored at home.

Someone suggested I try God, so I did. Totally selfishly I went to God asking for me. No praise and worship, no thanksgiving, no blood of Jesus, just, God, if you are really there, let me hear from my dad tonight. And I did. And I knew there was a God. That He answered prayer. That He cared about me. Was I saved? Not at all, and my life continued to show it, but this goodness of God was one of the steps that eventually led me to salvation.

Paul says, look around. Look inside. Look at all the ways God has shown His goodness to the human race. His kindness to you. Man, you are alive and well and strong and on and on... But you have looked down on those gifts. You have taken them all for granted. You assumed that you deserved it all, and when something was removed you were angry, like all those things belonged to you.

What you did not understand is that God was being good to you so you would love Him, desire Him. So you would take a look at your life and see if it measured up to what God was wanting from you, which you never even bothered to find out.

So God keeps doing good things in the earth to bring people to Himself. The greatest thing He does is continue to send out His Gospel message into all the world. For, though we will not get through the book of Romans without being strong believers in the doctrine of election, there is another truth that must be set right next to that teaching, that God so loved the world. That He is not willing in His heart of hearts that any should perish. Though He had and has a plan to choose, He has a heart to save, to love. Do you believe that God created Adam with a desire to see him fall into sin and destroy all the goodness of the human race?

Let the tension continue, as MacArthur calls it elsewhere, between the all-consuming love of God for His creatures, and the choosing of some to

salvation. “Whosoever will may come”. But, “Chosen from the foundation of the world.”

Back to Romans 2.

Follow his thought. Judges, hypocrites, stop it. You are all sinners, and all men deserve the inescapable judgment of God, and you are wrong to so lightly esteem what God has done for you to bring you to repentance, out of His great love. Here’s where all that leads:

## **2:5**

“But in accordance with your hardness and impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath...”

Sinners who are not repentant are said to have a hard heart. An unrepentant heart. The goodness of God was meant to break that hardness and bring you to Himself, but your heart is still hard. The Greek here is *sklerotes* from whom we get “sclerosis”, a hardening of the arteries. It’s a term I have lived with for many years. My own arteries are narrow, and can clog up and get hard.

Hardening of the arteries, as MacArthur says, can bring a person to the grave. Hardening of the spiritual heart will send a person to hell.

Don’t let your heart get hard. Don’t lay up treasures in hell. You see how Paul, possibly, was using Jesus’ own terminology here? Remember Jesus told us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasures in Heaven?

When you love the things of this present world and go after them, your spiritual heart grows harder every day to the things of God. After a while you are not even interested in reading your Bible or praying or showing up at church. That’s not old age. That’s hardness of heart. Many old

people keep reading and praying and fellowshiping, because they have guarded their heart against the treasures of earth.

That treasure that is mounting up, those houses and lands and cars and boats and clothes, may look nice here, but in fact if you could see the label on each package of stuff you have stored up, it says, "Subject to the wrath of God." You thought you were storing up goods for yourself and your family, but you were storing up God's eternal anger instead.

(Of course, caring for your own in the normal way is not the issue here, but gathering to yourself more than you actually need.)

"...in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

God has not balanced the books yet. Jesus took the punishment for "whosoever believes in Him" John 3:16. The rest of the world has decided they will bear their own judgment. They don't need Jesus. They don't need His kindness and goodness and patience. They are going to go it alone. The Scriptures are explicit about what is coming to them. Let me remind you of them, starting with the prophets.

Isaiah 66:15, 16, 23-24. "For behold the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury and His rebuke with flames of fire, for by fire and by His sword the Lord will judge all flesh... and from one Sabbath to another all flesh shall come to worship before Me... and they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Jeremiah 30:6-7. "... why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble..."

Ezekiel 39:21. "I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them."

Daniel 12: "...And there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time... and many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake... some to shame and everlasting contempt..."

Joel 2:1-2, 11. "...the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... strong is the One Who executes His Word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"

Amos 5:18-20. "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him... is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?"

Micah 1:2-4. "Listen, O earth, and all that is in it! Let the Lord be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple. For behold the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place."

Nahum 1:2,5,6. "God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; The Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies... the mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, all the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him."

Zephaniah 1:14-17. "The great day of the Lord is near [notice imminence, by the way, even in Old Testament speaking of the coming of Christ!] It is

near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm... I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.”

Haggai 2:6-7. “For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once more I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land, and I will shake all nations...”

Zechariah 14:1-6. “Behold the day of the Lord is coming... I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken... then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations... it shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light...”

Malachi 4:1. “For behold the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up...”

Do you get the impression that these Old Testament prophets had a prophets meeting and all decided to say the same thing in their various ministries? No, for the most part these men never met, nor did they, for the most part, read each other’s writings. Sovereignly, individually, the Lord put His own word inside their mouths, they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit unanimously spoke a word of judgment on this planet, equal to the sin outlined by Paul in chapter 1.

But, you say, that’s Old Testament. God’s in a good mood now. He’s changed from that angry style of the past. Wrong.

It is right to say that Christ has turned away God’s wrath from us. Romans will make that clear. But “us” is not everyone. For most of the earth’s people, past and present, and future, the judgment is still coming. If not,

there's some New Testament characters and writers who didn't get the memo: Let's start with Jesus Himself:

Mark 9:42-44. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched – where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Luke 21. Speaking of the time of Tribulation, Jesus says, "... these are the days of vengeance... there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people."

Revelation 3. To the Laodicean church, which is still with us today and has been, all through church history: "... because you are lukewarm... I will vomit you out of My mouth..."

Revelation 6:15-16. When Jesus returns in judgment, look at the reaction of all kinds of men, "... they hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him Who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb."

Revelation 19:15. "And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations... He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

The day of judgment is coming! Listen now to Paul and Peter and Jude:

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. "... God will send them strong delusion that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth..."

Romans 9:22. "God [the potter] wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

2 Peter 3:7. "the heavens and the earth... are now reserved for fire, until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

Jude 23. "... others, save with fear, pulling them out of the fire..."

And that final awful scene in Revelation, 20:11-15. "... I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it... I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God... and the dead were judged according to their works... Death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire... anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire..."

We are premillennial. We believe Jesus comes before the Millennium, takes up His own, and sets them before His own judgment seat, to give them rewards. The scene I just read to you is post-millennial. The millennium is over. Now the resurrection of damnation that Jesus spoke of. The great Day of Judgment.

There will be judgment and wrath when Jesus comes. There will be judgment and wrath during the Tribulation. And there will be judgment and wrath on this last encounter with a very angry God.

The Book has not changed. Paul is right. There is a "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

God will be proved to be right and good and holy. Never will that question arise again when all this judgment is finished. No one will doubt who has the right to rule the world. No one will lift a voice against God or any of His people in that day. The world will be turned right-side up, and what God had in mind from all eternity will be the norm. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", the prayer that millions of believers have prayed countless times, will be answered. And Jesus shall reign, as Watts wrote,



“where’er the sun doth its successive journeys run.

“His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore till moons shall wax and wane no more.”

## **2:6**

“who will render to each one according to his deeds.”

Those who are not reading the KJV here will note that that verse is in italics and quotes. Paul is using the Old Testament here, as he will often. I was struck with just how many verses in the Bible say this same thing.

Let’s take a look. This concept is very important as we transition to another concept in Romans, namely the two classes of people in the world. We’ve been talking about mankind as one huge class called sinners. But for the first time, Paul suggests that there are really two classes, and he uses this popular saying to introduce it. He is telling us the basis for the two classes of people. For those of us who believe in the grace of God, this concept may come as a shock, but it is all over the Bible.

Job 34:11. “...He repays man according to his work...” (Elihu)

Psalm 62:12. “... to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.”

Proverbs 24:12. “...will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

Jeremiah 32:19. “You... give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.”

Ezekiel 33:20. “O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways.”

Matthew 16:27. “The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

John 5:28-29. “... all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Revelation 2:23, to the church in Thyatira, “I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

Revelation 20:12, “... and the dead were judged according to their works...”

I confess that Romans 2 gave me pause for a while. And if you are not saturated with Romans 1, Romans 2 will cause you some problems, too. Romans 1, as elsewhere in the letter, condemns every man and woman to eternal damnation, because all sin.

But now there are two groups. You mean there are people who aren't so bad after all, and they get to go to Heaven? Where is salvation in this chapter? Where is grace and faith? They are coming later, and they are clear.

But Paul is giving us in chapter 2 the basis upon which God will judge all men, saved or not. And that basis is *your works*.

So we are saved by works? No! We are judged by works. It's such a critical distinction. And that distinction is brought out in Ephesians and Philippians. We learn that we are His *workmanship*. Then we learn that we, believers, were created for *good works*. He made us in Christ with the very purpose of producing good deeds. Philippians tells us we are to work out our salvation, *because it is God working in us*.

You did not get saved by doing any work. How can a corpse bring itself to life? But when you were given that new life, it immediately started you on

a path of good works. Most of you wanted to do something right away, so you got baptized to show there was some new life in there. Other things followed, you knew not how. You started giving. You started showing up whenever the church doors were opened. You started loving that cantankerous member of your family or neighborhood. All things became new, from within.

God had literally written His ways on your heart, as he promised He would do, through Jeremiah. Not just reading a book and trying real hard, but staying in touch with God and following those new inner desires.

Since God gave us these works, He can judge us on the basis of these works. And that is the basis of all judgment of all men. Works.

Not saved by works. Not earning God's favor by trying so hard. Saved by grace. But when all is said and done, God will not be looking at your words, but your works. Remember Matthew 7, a frightening word to many. Not those who call Jesus "Lord," but those who practice God's ways, will be entering the Kingdom.

I encourage you to read your Bible carefully. It would be so easy to dive into chapter 2 without looking and hit your head on a rocky passage that could hurt you for a long time. God give us grace to "sneak up" on troublesome passages. Read the context! Slowly let God unfold every thought surrounding the difficulty. Here is the progression of Romans 1 and 2:

Men are sinners. All men are going to be judged. And the basis of that judgment will be the fruit they produced with their lives. Paul does not tell us here how that fruit came to be. That will be in later chapters. But write it down: No deeds, trouble.

Let him spell it out more in the verses to come. He starts with the good deeds that God will be looking for. Isn't it wonderful that the answers for the test are spelled out? The test is your life. A final evaluation, a final

grade, is coming. Here's what you do to get a passing grade, and please understand, you can't do any of this without Christ being in your heart... So if I paint a picture that seems impossible to you, check your heart to see if Christ really lives there. What Paul is about to say is not a heavy thing for the born again, but it is very heavy for the lost, or at least those who have backslidden seriously. Let's see who needs to repent even tonight...

## **2:7**

"Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good..."

As in the Greek, the King James has "eternal life" last, so we will deal with that later. It's the reward for the behavior that is being spelled out.

Here's the requirement, produced by the Spirit in us as we are led by that Spirit: You've got to do good, and keep doing good. All the time. Perseverance. Continuing every day, moment by moment. Doing good. He doesn't tell us what good is, but we know. Loving one another. Caring for people. Being faithful to read the Word, pray, stay in church fellowship. Giving. Worshiping.

At first glance this verse seems to be a no-brainer and an obvious sentiment. But look again. Paul is saying, you must be perfect to get to heaven. Didn't Jesus say that? You will be perfect as My Father in Heaven, right? When we confess our sins, God perfects us. If we sin again, He forgives us again. Sin is not going to get into heaven. Get rid of sin by His holiness and His forgiveness. Yes, the righteous will scarcely be saved. Some will be lax in their repenting, and God will have to let them in by the skin of their teeth. Others will be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit.

You say, I'll be like that former person. I'll just sin a little, repent a little. If that is your attitude, there's a possibility you are not saved to begin with. God's true people do not think like that. But some of God's people do fall

into sin and gratefully accept God's forgiveness. They don't keep doing that, but it does happen.

An unsaved person who hangs around church says, I'm just as good as the rest of these folks. I'll just do what they do, and God has to save me. No He doesn't. God saves those who call on His name and repent of all their sins. Some of you need to repent for the first time.

"... seek for glory, honor, and immortality."

The way the verse is worded, we must understand it to say this: If you are a person who does good all the time, it is evidence that you are looking for some things that the world is not looking for. What is the world looking for? Money. Earthly security. Self-indulgence, happiness. Fun. Power. What is the true child of God looking for, as evidenced by his constant doing of good works? Paul mentions three things.

Glory. Not self-praise as the world seeks. "I did something great, look at me!" And not, in this passage, I think, God's glory, although it is connected. There's another glory we are seeking. 2 Corinthians 4:7 tells us that the light afflictions we are bearing are producing a weight of glory beyond anything we can imagine. Aren't you hoping for that glory?

Philippians 3 talks of the time when Jesus will come and transform our vile bodies in such a way that they will look and act like the glorious body of Jesus.

Jesus prayed to the Father about His disciples in John 17, and said that the glory given to Christ was given to the apostles. When we do good works we are seeking that glory of Father and Son to be manifested in us by the Spirit.

Honor. Jesus said to the Pharisees, I do not receive honor from men. Oh, every knee shall bow to Jesus one day. They will praise and honor Him. But no matter what we give Him, supposedly, it does not increase His

supply of honor. Jesus doesn't get more honorable when we honor Him. He cannot.

Those who do good works are seeking a similar honor. If you receive honor from men, you'll find it fades away in a few days. Even the greatest of the athletes get bored with life after a while, no matter what victories they have won. Politicians soon find that all the attention wasn't worth it as their lives are subject to the media and corruption of evil men. What honor are we seeking?

The honor of hearing Jesus say to us one day, Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful, I have more work for you to do now. Good job! Jesus imparts His honor to us, and that sticks. Aren't you looking for His well done?

Immortality. You who are doing good deeds every day are hoping for immortality. One day this mortal body which keeps falling apart and eventually stopping altogether, will be transformed into a body that will never die, never even catch a cold. This is not the end; we've only just begun.

That immortal body will need a place to be. That's what we call eternal life. There's been some confusion about this over the years. "Existence" and "life" are not the same. The unsaved are going to exist forever in torment and experiencing God's wrath. But they have not been given eternal life. They live in constant death.

Death does not mean, I'm unconscious and unaware, out cold. Death in the Bible is separation. God said, in the day you eat of that fruit you will die. They ate. Their bodies existed on for 900 years, but they were separated on that day from God. Their bodies finally ran out of human life in what we call death, the visible death.

But invisible death is all around us. Before you were saved, the apostle says you were dead in your sins. You needed life to make you aware of

your need of God. God in His graciousness gave you that life and you were born again.

The old Adamic part of you is going to the grave because of the curse in Eden. But you are going on. If Christ is in you now, you actually have that eternal life in you already. It's not about time, it's about the essence of the life principle, which is God Himself. If God lives in you, you can never be in death, or separation, again. Didn't the apostle say that, "I am persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ"? Nothing!

1 John 5:20 says that to know Jesus is to know God and to know God is eternal life. Not just "has it" but is it.

This is the eternal life that is given to those who are always doing good, and therefore are looking for immortality, looking for honor that comes only from God, glory that comes only from God.

But there is that other class...

## **2:8**

"but to those who are self-seeking (contentious) and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness..."

Not sure where the newer translations came up with "self-seeking" although the idea is remotely related? KJV has it right, literally "of contention." In regards to the truth, they are in disagreement. What a description of our modern America. Come up with a truth, and half the country and more is "in contention" ready to argue against it.

Wrong to kill babies? Those aren't babies, those are products of pregnancy.

Wrong to be intimate with the same gender? Not at all. Man must be free to love whom he will.

The Bible is enough? No, God is still talking. We need a new translation, we'll call it the "New World" Translation for this new world we are in. No, God is still talking, we need a different book altogether, maybe more. Joseph Smith has found such a book for us latter day saints. No, God is still talking. And by the same angel that announced Jesus, He talked to Muhammad and gave him the correct revelation. No, God is still talking, we need prophecies and tongues and revelations from Heaven to guide us. The old Book is not enough. We contend! We are contentious.

Every sin imaginable is contended for by a lost person. They must justify everything. And their arguments are against the truth; they will not obey the truth.

So what do they obey? If a wife does not obey her husband, who does she obey? If children do not obey their parents, whom do they obey? If a man will not obey the truth, what does he obey? Unrighteousness. Notice that truth is the opposite of unrighteousness. When you obey lies instead of the truth, you are in league with the father of all lies, the Devil, the lawless one, the epitome of unrighteousness. Lying, self-deceit and deceiving others is at the heart of evil.

What is coming to these people? The answer to that is split up into two verses but should be just one awful list. Here is what a liar, a contender for sin, a justifier of sin, an unrepentant sinner, an unrighteous person, can expect:

"... indignation and wrath,

**2:9**

"tribulation and anguish..."



They are given as two pairs of curses, thus the verse division. Each word demands a closer look, as we tend to overlook words we hear a lot in the Bible. I use research from MacArthur here.

Indignation. *Thumos*. Passion. Fierceness. It's the passion of the pursuer of an enemy while outraged. You just killed a member of my family. You're going to die. I'll come after you until you have paid for this.

Pharaoh had this fierce passion in regard to Moses, Hebrews 11:27. The Jews in the synagogue of Nazareth were roused with passion as the man in front of them claimed to be a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. They were going to throw Him over a cliff. Paul ran into *thumos* when the idol merchants of Ephesus challenged his right to preach an idol-free God.

Mankind, you have challenged Almighty God. He's coming after you. You can get rid of your sins in an instant now, but reject this Jesus and you will see the indignation of God, His rightful hatred of your sin.

Wrath. Indignation coupled with wrath. Fury. Extreme anger. No more mercy. No more grace. It's over. The Lamb has become the Lion. The gentle Jesus meek and mild will tread out the vengeance of God on a rebellious people. Don't forget Noah. Don't forget Lot. Don't forget Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus the Roman Commander. Vengeance is coming.

Tribulation. Didn't get the message yet? Tribulation, pressure. Affliction. Anguish. Persecution. The early church received this. The saints in general, who did not deserve it, received it. How much more those who do deserve it by their lying against the truth? This is the word used in Revelation 14 to describe the crushing of the grapes of wrath at Armageddon.

Distress. *Stenochoria*. A narrow place. Came to mean confinement. Some say this is the very worst form of punishment. Cut my head off and I'm gone, it's over. Stick a sword in my belly, shoot me in the head, I'm done.

Goodbye world, hello Jesus. But put me in a cell all by myself, with just a few feet to move in, and no possible hope of release. That's distress. And that's what's coming.

Eternal hell will be the confinement of all confinements. Locked in place. No hope of escape. No Savior to say, you can come out now, your God has rescued you, Daniel, Shadrach, Mescach, Abednego. Jeremiah, it was horrible down in that pit, but it's over now, come on up. Here, I'll pull you with this rope. None of that. Confined forever. That's distress.

This is what the lost have to look forward to. Can we do something to help them?

"...on every soul of man who does evil..."

Any exceptions here tonight? Anyone who has never done evil? Aren't you glad you're safe tonight? Have you come into Christ and Christ into you? Then you are indeed safe from this very angry God who is coming to judge the earth.

"... of the Jew first and also of the Greek." (Gentile)

First, the chosen people. Amos 3:2, Macarthur brings out, and this is a tough one, speaking to Israel, from God Himself:

"You only have I known, or chosen, of all the families of the earth..."

Think of it. How many people groups, nations, families, societies are there in the world? Abraham himself was called out of a pagan nation-empire to be God's special person. Isaac, Jacob, Judah. The people Israel, called out of Egypt by God's mighty hand, brought by miracle after miracle to the land that shall be forever theirs, though Israel may have to be re-defined.

Has there ever been a nation like Israel, ever been a people like the Jews? Absolutely not. And we can weep with Jesus as we hear the rest of Amos 3:2,

“Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities...”

B-b-b-but God is love, He doesn't punish. Use another word. The Bible I have says punish. Let me look that up to be sure I read it right (Merriam-Webster):

“to impose a penalty on for a fault, offense, or violation. To inflict a penalty for the commission of an offense in retribution or retaliation...”

Grandpas don't punish. They give candy and cash. Fathers, good ones, punish. Oh how God- Jesus – loved Israel. The tears are real. And so is the punishment. Jacob's trouble is coming. We call it the Tribulation. The entire world will suffer because of Jacob's sins. Many of Israel will be saved after that.

Well, at least we Gentiles are off the hook! No, just wait your turn. The Jew is first, not only. After the Jewish Tribulation, here comes King Jesus, the Jew. The Jew of all Jews. He's on a mission. He's riding a white horse. You see Him? Eyes like fire, robe dipped in blood, sword coming out of His mouth. See Him? What's He doing? He's striking the nations. The Gentiles. Oh, His church is with Him, safe and sound at that time, but the nations are being trodden down by this conquering King. Trodden down in the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Oh yes, to be sure, the Jew first. The Jew received the first call, the first revelation, the Scriptures, the prophets, the Messiah, the Gospel, the first church. With responsibility like that they must have first judgment for rejecting it all. But the Gentiles will be a close second, for they too rejected the revelation given to them and suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.

Of course, that's not the whole story. Remember, there is a class of people in the world, a third force, if you will, that will receive

**2:10**

"... glory, honor and peace..."

Remember who they are? We just read about them in verse 7 above. They are the ones who

"work what is good..."

And you will recall that we concluded, based on context, that these are not just some ordinary earthlings that tried a little harder than their neighbors; these are the redeemed. These are the born-again.

Many will look to this whole passage when you ask them if they think they are going to heaven, and say, Well, I'm not totally sure, but compared to most people, I'm not really that bad. Church-goers are the ones who may have this problem the most, because they hang around people who do indeed have the Spirit of God in them, and some of it seems to rub off. But rubbed-off salvation won't work on that day.

Be very sure, the song said, "be very sure your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock." That rock is Jesus. Are you trusting Him alone to save you? Has He entered your life and begun the change? I didn't say "finished" but at least begun? Are you different than you were, simply because of your new birth? That's the sign of your salvation, that's the evidence of the filling of the Spirit. Then you are in this new number.

"... to the Jew first and also to the Greek/Gentile..."

Yes, this Good News went to Jews first, on Pentecost and thereafter. Three thousand Jews came into the church on its birthday. And when Paul

began his rounds, where did he always go first? To the Jewish synagogue. The early church was very Jewish.

But we're talking about rewards and judgment. I showed you where the Jews will be judged first. The Tribulation, followed by the second coming where Gentiles will be judged. But Israel, whatever that means, will also be rewarded first, or so it seems. The elect 144,000 Israelites, which are largely hidden during the Tribulation, are sealed in Revelation 7, followed immediately by the slow entrance *by martyrdom* of the Gentile saints. The Dragon tries to hurt Israel and cannot, then it comes after the church. It seems that Israel will precede the largely Gentile flock into the blessings of God.

## **2:11**

“For there is no partiality with God.”

That must sound strange here. We just said Jews are first all the time, whether in receiving the Gospel or receiving judgment or receiving rewards. Jews first. But obviously, first does not mean done deal. Often in Scripture, the second-born or even later-born child gets the blessing: Abel. Isaac. Jacob. Judah. Joseph. David. Solomon...

Israel was blest first, but Israel fell from God, and God went to those other sheep. First isn't everything. God has no partiality. The basis is not birth order, education, gender. The basis – and we are talking about judgment here – is unforgiven sin. No matter who you are or think you are, if you are an unforgiven sinner, you're lost forever. When it comes to sin and grace there is no Jew or Gentile.

Our God is just. He treats everyone equally and with justice. Impartiality is just another of His many traits we can count on.

Partiality. Another fascinating word given us by the Greeks: *prosopolemptes*. From *prosopon* which is “face” or “front”. And a form of the verb *lambano*, “to take or receive.”

So, “to receive face.” What? To look at someone’s face, their outward appearance, and say, “I receive that.” Not to look at their character, their reasoning, their inner life, just the face. That’s partiality, and God doesn’t have that.

Macarthur mentions here “Lady Justice,” the old Roman goddess of justice, *Justitia*. You’ve seen pictures of her? What is strange about “Lady Justice”? Right, she is blindfolded! She can’t see. She can’t see your face, your outward appearance. Your smile or tears. In some statues her hands are tied also, so she cannot receive a bribe.

A truly just human needs a blindfold and a rope. We are so partial based on the wrong things.

As the judge: Why you poor dear, you’re crying. Oh, you have a gift for me? You must be a loving person, you could never have done such a bad thing. Case dismissed.

Our God needs no blindfold or rope. He cares not how many good things you have piled up through the years to bribe Him into accepting you. If you reject the sacrifice of His Son for your sins, or worse yet, come into His presence all smiles like you never did sin, your judgment will be swift and awful.

God has no partiality. Peter, a Jew, had to learn that firsthand. He preached to Jews on the Day of Pentecost, opened the door to the Kingdom to Israel! 3000 saved! Then God seemed to say to Peter, I gave you more than one key to the Kingdom. You’ve opened the door to the Jews, why not bring a key to the Gentiles, and let them in?

Gentiles? Lord I've been a good Jew. Even in his sleep when a vision occurred to Peter asking him to disobey the old Jewish rules about what to eat and not to eat, Peter said, no way, I'm a good Jew. You love the Jews. You love our ways. Never will I do Gentile disobedience.

Go downstairs, Peter. I want you to make a little trip. You're going to a Gentile home and you're going to preach the same Gospel there that you did on Pentecost. Can you hear Peter grumbling all the trip, "I'm a good Jew, we are the chosen people. You came to us when no Gentiles were interested in the true God!" Keep walking Peter, do I have a surprise for you.

So he enters a Gentile house. Preaches. And the Holy Spirit falls in that Gentile house on Gentile people. What is Peter's response? I know now that God is not one who shows partiality!

Same for you here. Call on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. No excuses. Well, I'm not religious. Well, I wasn't raised with that. Well, I've really messed up! God is no respecter of "face". He'll save anyone who calls on His Name.

## **2:12**

"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law..."

Looks like a new idea here, but it is really repetition. We are still talking about two main groups of people, who, when added together, equal the whole human race. The theme is consistent. All are sinful, and all deserve judgment.

First a group of people in the world who sin without law. The "law" here of course is the law of Moses. Most people in the world know nothing, and have known nothing, of Moses' law. The law was given to and prized by Israel. Later, Christians filled with God's Spirit have that very law written on their hearts. But most do not know of that law, and therefore

disobey it unwittingly, and will be lost. We saw in chapter 1 that ignorance of the law is no excuse, as ignorance of a tiny bit of poison in a quart of water will not keep you from instant death when you drink it. He will further explain why Gentiles deserve eternal loss as well as Jews in verse 14 and 15. Right now we know, so far, that Gentiles who do not know and keep the law will perish.

Perish? Doesn't that simply mean go out of existence? No, the word means to be fully destroyed. But doesn't that mean that eventually you no longer exist? Think of the perishable foods in your refrigerator. If they stay there long enough, you grab them and pitch them into the garbage, for their further decay.

They are worthless, castaways, but the picture is not perfect, because Jesus talked about a place where the worm dies not, showing us that destruction from the Lord is an eternal thing. Forever ruined. Forever useless. Forever in decay, but the worm that would normally feed on that corpse and then itself die, does not die, but keeps feeding on cells that keep being replenished. Even the damned will have resurrected bodies, bodies fit for showing the wrath of God forever. Horrible thoughts, but drawn right from the revelation of God, and needing our attention. No one gets to just lay down and rest forever if they have rejected the God of Heaven.

Gentiles, get saved!

“... and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...”

So who is meant by that? Certainly, the Jews. There is no question that the Jewish people have had access to the law of Moses for about 3,500 years. When they appear before the judgment bar they will be judged by that law, unless they have accepted the judgment that was placed on Christ on their behalf. The words of Moses are clear. The prophets told them that the soul that sins shall die. Unforgiven sin means no entrance into the Holy Place of God. And sins cannot be forgiven except through



the Blood of the spotless Lamb of God. Jews that are not eventually Jews for Jesus are damned.

So there it is again. All Gentiles plus all Jews equals all people and all people have sinned and all people are therefore under the curse of God. Paul is making a solid case here.

A question arises in some hearts. MacArthur goes there a while, and I will follow for a while. Will Jews and Gentiles be punished alike in hell? When Jesus talked in Luke 12:47-48 about slaves who knew their master's will vs slaves who did not know that will and were therefore punished less, was he talking about Jew vs Gentile? The Gentiles after all did not know the Master's will. I think it is a dangerous road to travel, because Paul is just about to explain here that Gentiles really did know some things. We covered a little of this in chapter 1.

Yet Jesus' words do need to be applied somewhere. In that same passage in Luke we read of servants who are cut in two and thrown out with unbelievers. Then the tone is lessened a little when talking about some bad servants who get punished but not thrown out. I would not be surprised to find that this flogging of servants who turned out to be lazy and indifferent, applies to us. Saved people who left their first love for a while, who got caught up in worldly pursuits, but who were saved, as Paul says, as through fire.

Something to ponder as you study on your own. Luke 12: 42-48.

Now at the following verse in the KJV and the NKJV, and at verse 14 in the NIV, you'll see a parenthesis. And you'll see its brother down at the end of verse 15. No, that doesn't mean that these words were not in the original. It means that in the mind of the translators Paul is inserting a thought inside of a thought. I believe KJV people got it right there. If you read verse 12 and then skip immediately to verse 16 and keep reading, you'll see a flow of thought that makes sense.

Please understand that punctuation marks of any kind are not inspired by the Spirit. They are placed there by translators who believe they have caught the flow of the communication. Sometimes they miss it. In this case I think they got it right.

In fact, if you want to get really technical, and I'm sure you do not, there is a thought within a thought in verses 13-15 too. Let's examine the thoughts.

The original thought: (v. 12, 16) Everyone will be judged by their deeds on judgment day. The 2nd thought within this original: (v. 13.) Hearing is not enough. You must do. The 3rd thought inside of that one: (v. 14-15). For example, look at the Gentiles.)

That's not me, that's Paul. Logical to the max. Leave nothing out. Take no prisoners. Nail that truth down in every way possible.

We'll skip the parenthetical statement now and go to verse 16.

(First, let's re-read verse 12. "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law, )

2:16

"... in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

Now that verse is packed with important information. I believe it is a restating of verse 5 that talks about "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Here, Paul goes deeper. There, he goes on to talk about deeds. Here, God speaks of the motivations that caused those deeds.

Remember? Moses said, “No killing!” Jesus said, stop the hatred and the anger within, and the killing will stop by itself. Why do we sin? Because deep inside we are sinners. Why do we manifest these awful symptoms? Because deep inside we have a disease. Why is mankind in turmoil with worse headlines on the news every day? Because deep inside, mankind, in its secret thoughts and ideas, is corrupt, depraved. God will one day judge all those secrets.

By Jesus Christ? I showed you in another place how Christ will come to judge the nations. That’s in Revelation. But Peter makes it clear in talking to Cornelius, Acts 10, that it is Jesus “who was ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead.” God will judge the world. But He’s going to do it by Jesus at His coming. Paul in speaking to the men of Mars Hill, Acts 17, even more clear: “God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom he has ordained...”

But what of this other phrase, “according to my Gospel.” How is the “Good News” connected to this awful coming judgment from Heaven?

Whose Gospel is this, to begin with? Did Paul have his own account of the life of Jesus, the “Gospel of Paul”? No, Paul’s Gospel was the same as the others. Paul was saying that Jesus had committed Him to publish the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus resurrection. 2 Timothy 4:8 mentions this same phrase, “Remember that Jesus Christ... was raised from the dead according to my Gospel.” He was not the author of a new Gospel, just a publisher of the original Gospel. Nothing he ever says contradicts anything said in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. His Gospel was the Gospel of Christ.

So is this Gospel to be the basis for judgment? No. Paul has just told us, though we skipped those verses for a moment, that the Gentiles have not the Law, and we know most of them do not have the Gospel either, yet they will be judged regardless on another basis, which we will discuss.

Commentators stew over this phrase. MacArthur does not comment on it at all. It’s not as easy as it seems. The best we can come up with, I think, is

the fact that the judgment of the world is connected with the resurrection of the dead. I did not give you the full quote in Acts 17:31. Yes, God has appointed a day of judgment, and a person to judge, namely Jesus. He goes on to say, “[God] has given assurance of this [fact of the coming judgment by Jesus] to all, by raising Him from the dead.”

There is Paul’s Gospel, and it must be ours too. God calls us all to repent, to believe in Jesus. God raised this Jesus from the dead, and he is going to come to the earth one day and rid the world of evil. Sin will be dealt with. Injustice will become justice. The secrets of men will be exposed and condemned. A new world with new rules and new ways, God’s ways. His Kingdom will have come, as we prayed all these centuries, and His will will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

That’s good news. No, the good news is not the basis of the judgment, but the judgment, strangely enough, is a part of the good news. The finished work of Christ anticipates a finished end to sin. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

Now, some unfinished business. Back to verses 13-15.

### **2:13**

(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified...

James 1:22-23 lines up with that thought, right? He says for us not to be hearers only, but doers. People who love to hear but don’t love to do, are deceiving themselves. Here is a test of whether we are in the true Christian faith or not. We love to hear messages. Sermons on CD, in a Bible study. Christian music. Intake constantly. But do we love to do what we are told in all those messages? We heap up teachers because our ears itch to have someone say we’re ok, we’re on the right track, all is well. And if the messages get negative, we can change channels or CD’s or you-tube video.

As I came to this part of my writing and study, brother Ezekiel shouted in my ear, Let me talk to them, brother! So I stepped aside, and here is what Ezekiel said (Ezekiel 33:30-32). And he said it because I believe that in much of the Western comfortable church, this is where we are. Can you bear a heavy word from a prophet of God?

“As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, ‘Please, come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.’ So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain (we are justified by works ultimately). Indeed, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.”

Oh American church! Entertainment in the pulpit. Dynamic preaching and teaching on YouTube. Wonderful “Gospel” music. Sounds so good. But I wonder. If David Phelps, one of my favorites, could not hit the high notes, would I listen to his message? Does Gospel music reach my soul, but bypass my spirit? Does it make me feel good or does it cause me to do good? That preacher, does he make me cry? Or does he make me *die to myself* and change my life? Is the church changing by all the many messages, or only continuing on?

When people or churches do not change, they die. Trees change all year long. They are still the same tree next year, but radically different too. If we or our churches are the very same next year as this, we have wasted an entire year. Let the change come. Not the Gospel! Not the Book! It doesn’t need to change. But let me change. Slowly fashioned into His image. Next year I should still be Bob but a radically different Bob. Not because I heard, but because I did.

Of course, all that comes from an initial encounter with the Spirit of God. And when we draw near to Him, and listen, changes happen. If we refuse to listen and just keep listening to what we've always listened to, our traditions and selfish habits, this tree will have to be plucked up by the roots and cast into the fire.

Hearing is the first thing that happens. What is missing in Romans 2 is the second thing that happens: the infusion and grace of the Holy Spirit to motivate and empower. Then comes the works, the final step. And it is therefore by our works, works created by God in us, that we will be judged. It is because of God's grace in us that we have no excuse for not doing the works He has assigned.

So, Paul says, in the long run, it won't be hearers, even of the law of Moses or the Gospel, but doers, that will be saved. But how can that be if they don't have a chance to hear God's law?

Paul answers that question next.

#### **2:14-15a**

“for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law unto themselves, who show the works of the law written in their hearts.”

So they do have the law! It's been written on their hearts from the beginning of their lives. Men do know what is right and wrong. They don't have to read Exodus 20 to know that they shouldn't be killing and stealing and cheating on their wives. It's universal. Not only does nature teach us who God is, as in chapter 1, but our instincts show us what God wants. You were born with a knowledge of right and wrong.

All of us know some very good people. That's what we would call them. Jesus said, there is none good but one, namely God. But God has written His law in our heart and there are some people who seem to measure up favorably. They would do anything for us, and have done some things

when we were in need. They are the volunteers when a community needs a baseball coach or a hospital helper or a food drive chairman. They genuinely like people and enjoy doing things for them.

And they are the hardest people, often, to bring to Christ. Why? Christ talks to them about sin and their need for forgiveness and a new heart.

But why should they want that, they ask. They are already good-hearted people, they say. Just look at what I do.

But there is sin, we say.

And they say, who are you to judge me? Look at some of the people in your church, still smoking and drinking and cussing like a sailor, using God's name in vain, hanging out at the parties and worldly events. My life is better than theirs already. Thanks anyway.

Won't it be awful when they get to the day of judgment – and they will – and God says to them, "On what basis should I allow you into My Heaven?"

They will say, "I was a good person, I did many wonderful works." Jesus will say, "Your good works are a witness against you. Go to everlasting fire."

They will answer, "What? How can my good works witness against me?"

Response: "You knew I demanded good works, but you knew also you were not perfect before me, as no one is. That means that there were bad works mixed in, and you let them slide. You did not consult me about the bad works, only tried to impress me and others with the good ones. I only accept perfect people in this realm. You could have been perfect by My forgiveness and my Spirit's working in you, but you chose the way of pride. You said you did not need me. So I never had a relationship with

you. Your only relationship was with yourself and your pride. You must now be lost forever.”

So the Gentiles, though not avid readers of Moses, have a law inside them. Each Gentile makes up His own book of Exodus and tries to live by it. He may be pretty successful in keeping His own book, but his book is faulty to begin with. His book probably doesn't deal with motivation, secret sins, "little sins", so when he tries to present his book and his record to a holy God, God will not accept it.

“Well, I do the best I can with what I know.” Not enough.

“Well, I'm not perfect, but I do more good than I do bad.” Not enough.

“Well, I'm surely better than those hypocrites over at church.” May be true. But not enough.

Here's God's standard. Matthew 5:48. “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

James 2:10. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”

And to all the outwardly talkative “Lord, Lord,” people, the self-styled prophets, believers majoring in demons, so called miracle-workers, Jesus will say, “I never knew you. Leave Me.” Why? “You practice lawlessness. You knew My ways and majored in your own ideas and practices. You disobeyed Me at every turn, and chose rather to be somebody. Well, now you are somebody. Your very description is in the Holy Bible, but you and I never had a relationship at all. Go!”

Many will hear that awful sound. The rejection of a man who may or may not have heard the law or the Gospel, but who decided to create a law of his own making and try to obey it.



“Sad, sad that bitter wail, almost... but lost.”

“... their conscience also bearing witness...”

The conscience is separated in Paul’s thinking, from the heart. God has written His law in the hearts of mankind. Man takes that law and adds to or takes away, then trains his conscience to obey it. A child may grow up thinking, rightly, that to kill a baby, whether in or outside of Mommy, is a very bad thing. Evil. But if he is raised in a home where he is taught that that thing inside Mommy is not really a baby at all, but just some tissue that’s part of Mommy, he must change his God-given thinking, and retrain his conscience.

This all goes back to chapter 1, where we studied the suppression of truth inside man. He’s born with a great measure of truth, but through the years that truth is re-shaped and re-formed, perverted. Oh how important is the job of a mother and father today, to shape a child’s conscience, the sense of right and wrong that activates guilt.

Let us say unequivocally, someone is going to shape that conscience. Friends at school will shape it. The media will shape it. Give your children up to the people of this world and their thinking processes, and your child will slowly but surely have a conscience like the Bible describes elsewhere, seared with a hot iron. Is that your hand on the handle of that iron?

“No, I didn’t do it. It’s that liberal teacher at school. It’s that awful news network.” May I suggest that the parents of Bible days who threw their children into the fire as an offering to Moloch, could also scream, “I didn’t kill my child, it was the fire.” Good luck with that excuse. You are responsible for what goes into the eyes and ears of your child. Some parents need to make some quality decisions. Conscience-forming begins just after birth.

What will your conscience tell you to do? Answer: What you have fed into it, as though it were a computer. Tell yourself, prove to yourself, that homosexuality is good and normal, and your conscience will slowly stop screaming about it. Don't get proud here. The same thing is true about how you drive and how you eat. These aren't cute little sins, they are proof of a conscience that is not sharp any longer.

Macarthur points out something you may already know. Leprosy, the disease, does not eat flesh away. Leprosy desensitizes the nerves, so that pain is not felt. Cuts, burns, infections can take their toll on a leper, and he doesn't feel a thing.

That's the disease of the perverted conscience. Warning signs are ignored at first, then invisible, inaudible. "I didn't think that was wrong." But it was anyway, and unconfessed it will send you to hell.

When I was speaking on behalf of the persecuted church for VOM, I told the people that actually my job is the job of the nerve cell in the human body. You see, there are not two bodies of Christ, the persecuted church and the Western un-persecuted church. There's only one church. Jesus thinks of His church as His body. One body. And that body is persecuted. My job was to take the knowledge of that pain in the body and communicate it to where it would do some good. Pain is a good thing. When the western church heard my stories, they prayed, they gave, some perhaps decided to go deeper.

If you no longer feel pain when you read certain Scriptures that are clearly against your behavior, the Word hasn't changed. The Spirit hasn't changed. Your conscience has changed. Ask God for pain. Conviction. The first days. Your first love of God which implies your first hatred of sin.

Paul includes all under sin. The Jews have their law. The Gentiles have their God-written conscience. Both are testimonies against us, crying out for a rush to Jesus Christ.

“... and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)”

A bit difficult here. The NKJV has added “between themselves” for a reason. Let me take you to the Greek text itself, word for word:

“...and between one another the reasonings accusing or also defending.)”

This rendering in the NKJV has led some to say that we are talking about Gentiles talking with Gentiles about moral values. The KJV and most other translations believe that the sense is that the whole dialogue is going on inside of you. One thought rises up and says “Do this, it’s OK.” Another thought rises up and questions the first thought. And so on.

But the point over all is that our consciences, despite the sage advice of Jiminy Cricket, cannot be our guides. Yes, with the help of Walt Disney, children in my generation were taught that the conscience should be the guide. Remember this moment of guidance:

When you get in trouble  
And you don't know right from wrong  
Give a little whistle!  
Give a little whistle!  
When you meet temptation  
And the urge is very strong  
Give a little whistle!  
Give a little whistle!

Not just a little squeak  
Pucker up and blow  
And if your whistle's weak  
Yell Jiminy Cricket  
Take the straight and narrow path  
And if you start to slide  
Give a little whistle!

Give a little whistle!  
And always let your conscience be your guide.

Just innocent Disney. Really? He sets up a Bible-based problem and attempts to solve it with fantasy and bad theology.

No, when you don't know what to do, call out to Jesus, read His Word, talk with His people, and let your conscience be formed and then guided by God's revelation. Man's conscience without God's direct input will guide him, for sure: to sin, death, and hell.

So much for the Gentiles. The rest of Romans 2 is dedicated to the Jews, but let's listen in as Paul addresses them.

**2:17.**

"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law and make your boast in God,"

Following the authorized text and its Greek, that word "indeed" probably doesn't fit. The word is an interjection used to show surprise and is most often translated "look" or "see". Old English would be "behold." As in, "Hey, Romans, take a look at this." And perhaps he is now picking up from verse 12, where he left off before that parenthetical section:

"you are going to be judged by the law, but look at this, my Jewish friend, you are resting on the law to save you!"

They call you a "Jew". Ever since the Babylonian captivity, that name had surfaced as the identifier of Israel. It's a good name. Comes down from Judah. The fourth son of Jacob/Israel. Israel is still the name of the nation. Jacob's family is called after Jacob's new name. But this term Jew stuck.

Judah. "Celebrated." "Praised." Genesis 49:8, Jacob in the Spirit makes a play on words here when he prophesies,

“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise...” Judah is promised the scepter. His family will produce the true kings of Israel. Judah will produce David and Hezekiah and Josiah... and Jesus, the truly celebrated one, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Oh, it’s a good name, Jew.

But the Jews, by and large, missed out on the blessing that their very name prophesied. They were called “praised”. And who was praising them, honoring them above all the nations of the earth? God Himself. Why? For His own purposes. Why does God choose anyone? His own purposes.

But the Jews began taking that name, that promise, that praise, and applying it to themselves, and praising one another, and resting in the fact that the Law was given to them, boasting that this God loved them and no one else, because they were so wonderful. Why would God call us if we weren’t the finest people on earth?

Notice the fine line of difference here. We stand back and say, there has never been a nation like Israel. How blessed, how praised. But because of God’s choice. They began to say, we are a great nation because we were so special in God’s eyes that He had to choose us. What else could He do when He saw us?

What a horrible and damning misunderstanding. I read to you from their Law, the book of Deuteronomy chapter 9:4 and following, Moses speaking,

“Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast out [nations before you], ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you... for you are a stiff-necked people... from the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord...” He goes on to list all the evils they have already committed... and they are

still in the wilderness! They went on to out-do the pagans in their idolatry in the new land God gave them. They went on further, to crucify the Son of God.

So you are resting in your law? Boasting in your God? Hoping that the name “Jew” will cover you?

Doesn't this attitude remind you of people you know (I hope not you, yourself) who rest in the name Christian or Calvin or Pentecostal or any of a number of names people hide behind in our own day? Some are resting in their baptism as a child. Their church membership. Their friendship with other Christians. Their good works.

There is no rest in anything short of what Jesus did for you. Rest in Him.

## **2:18**

“...and know His will...”

Like us, they know what God wants. Written messages from prophets, and in our case, apostles of God. They and we cannot claim ignorance. “What about those who never heard?” Better question, what about those who have heard, and who know so much? What about those who memorized entire books of the Bible? We know His will. Are we resting in that knowledge or have we asked God to make that word come alive in actions? Knowing is not enough.

“...and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law...”

They knew the book so well that they could even “rightly divide” it. They could tell which things were most important, which things were of lesser importance. Jesus tested His Pharisee accusers and sometimes they came out well:

Actually, one day they tested His knowledge of the Scriptures. (By the way, we are not knocking learning and knowledge, only saying it cannot be enough. One must do what he knows.)

Mark 12:28 and following tells the story of some scribes who asked Jesus, What is the first commandment? Jesus told them the first, and then told them the second, something they had not asked for. They were impressed, and gave an answer to Jesus that was very wise. Jesus said to that group of Pharisee-Scribes, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

They were on their way. They approved the things that were excellent. They knew what was best and second best and so on. But were they ever saved? We don’t know. You see, “not far” is still too far. The entrance to the kingdom stood before them. They knew His ways, but did they ever know Him?

Not only were the Jews resting and boasting and well-informed and discerning, or so they thought, they had a self-confidence that probably was not warranted, at least based on the interactions Jesus had with them. Verse 19:

**2:19**

“... and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind...”

What did Jesus say about that? Matthew 15:14, 23:24, He called them guides for sure, but blind guides! They were always being offended by the things Jesus said. One day He just told His disciples, “Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” And in John 9:40, after He healed the one born blind, and commented on blindness, the Pharisees wanted to know if they were blind also. Instead of saying here, Yes, you are blind, He says, if you would just admit that you can’t see anything, I could deal with you, but you

really think you can see. And your sin, your pride, your self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, remain.

And that brings us right back to Romans 2. “You are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind...” But are you really?

And you are confident that you are

“... a light to those who are in darkness...”

Jesus, in John 12, said, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” But in that same chapter, Luke comments, with the pathos of the Spirit of God going all the way back to Isaiah, “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him... ‘Lord who has believed our report?’”

Who is the “they” in this chapter that Luke speaks of? There were some Greeks standing nearby, and a crowd of people, Jewish people. No one but a few disciples believed on Him. Yet the Jews according to Paul, and I might add, to this day, believe they are a light to those in darkness. But those who do not speak according to this Word, evidence to all of us that there is no light in them.

And Jews, you are confident, says Paul, that you are

## **2:20**

“... an instructor of the foolish...”

You are wise. People should listen to you. Foolish people will gain wisdom from listening to the rabbis, yes? Jesus does not agree.

Matthew 23 offers a long list of reasons why the Jewish leadership was not to be trusted:



- They lay heavy burdens on you but they will not move them with one of their fingers.
- They do everything they do to be seen of men.
- They exalt themselves before men.
- They fool people by their long-winded prayers.
- They think the gold of the temple is greater than the temple itself.
- They think that it is important to tithe their spices but they have no mercy to offer anyone.
- They are clean on the outside but dirty on the inside.

There are more. But these are enough to show that the Jewish leadership had no wisdom to offer the people.

Such harsh words by Jesus need to be taken seriously by anyone who would be considered a leader of God's people. It is an awesome responsibility to stand before the people of God.

The Jews were even confident that they are a teacher of baby believers. Filled with knowledge that they can offer to one who is just starting on his way with God.

“... a teacher of babes...”

But right away our minds go to a certain night in Jerusalem when an important member of the ruling class of Israel had a private appointment with this new teacher, Jesus. He would never forget from that night how the wind was blowing and the trees were rustling when Jesus compared that wind to the Spirit of God and how that Spirit invisibly enters a man and begins life anew. He would not forget the shame he felt when this ex-carpenter spoke things Nicodemus had not heard before and then rebuked him by asking, “Seriously, are you a teacher in Israel, and you don't know what I'm talking about?”

How could Nicodemus or any Jewish leader bring the people of God to their God without them knowing about the prophecies of Jeremiah and the New Covenant, and Isaiah's suffering servant and all the rest?

We must ask ourselves the question Jesus asked that Jewish Council member, Am I a teacher, am I a dad, a mom, a leader of any kind in the church and in my home, and I don't know these things? I don't know how to lead my family members to Christ? What am I leading them to? What is my leadership about? Is eternity in my leading and teaching?

This long description of the self-confident Jew, which we can apply to ourselves easily as Gentiles ends with,

"...having the form of knowledge and truth in the law..."

That word "form" is used one other time, same Greek word, *morphosis* when Paul talks to Timothy about people who have a "form" of godliness, but deny the power of it. An outline. A formula. An appearance. A semblance. Looks like something, but isn't really, it's just the outside. Empty suits. Empty heads. Empty hearts.

Why, to look at a Pharisee with his clothing, His decorations that symbolized the law, his wealth, his knowledge, was to look at a model of perfection. But his self-confidence is condemned here.

I don't think Paul is only talking of Jewish leaders. Jews in general. They had become and have become a people totally reliant on outward forms and history, and it happens in religion after religion and church after church and person after person and it can happen to you here in this place. We may start out well, but life and/or church practice becomes a habit. A happy habit for a while. Then a drudgery habit, but if we've trusted the habit too long, we don't know how to break out of it. These words and the words of Jesus call us to better things.

The cults prey on "habit" Christians. They prey on restlessness. Tired old ways. They have something better, something new, and God's sheepish

people will follow. Then they find that the new becomes old again and they have become enclaved to error.

So Paul has described the Jews of His day, and I think it is safe to say that the description has fit throughout the centuries, minus those few times of revival. Is that an antisemitic statement? Yes. I am antisemitic as much as I am anti-Gentile. So is Paul, the Jew. We must be against things that are against God.

Now he has a series of questions of these same people. Let's remember to try to put ourselves in this test and see how well we do.

**2:21**

“You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself?”

Once more let Jesus weigh in on the conversation, since it is His conversation after all. The leaders of Judaism in Jesus' day were hypocrites. They taught others but did not teach themselves. Matthew 23:2-3, paraphrase: “The scribes and Pharisees have had Moses' authority passed on to them, so do what they tell you, but don't follow their works. They say, but they don't do.”

“When all is said and done there is a lot more said than there is done...”

That's a very important thing for us to know, for the church too has had hypocritical teachers through the centuries. Many are offended and leave the church when they see hypocrisy. That's not the command of Jesus. Jesus says, “Listen to them when they are speaking truth, but don't follow them.” If everyone who is put off by a hypocrite leaves the church, what happens to the church?

Perhaps you can lovingly confront the hypocrite. Pray for him. But leaving is not an option.

I ran into a brother the other day who has dropped out of church. He proudly proclaimed, “I am the church.” He implied that he didn't need

church any longer. This brother had been in the gangs. They beat him within an inch of his life when he left the gangs for the church. And now he leaves the church. Wise?

No. He is not the church. He is one little member. And the church needs him and he needs the church, and everyone listening now is in the same category of need.

Hypocrite teachers, Paul wants to know, do you teach yourself? Asaph has a word for you if you do not, in Psalm 50:16 and following. He calls you wicked.

“To the wicked God says, ‘What right have you to declare my statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; ... these things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you...”

Leaders, teachers, people in any authority in the church or home, listen carefully to Jesus and Asaph, and let’s not forget James:

“Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

It seems that Paul had Asaph in mind when he spoke the next few lines in the text:

“You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?”

Thievery can take a lot of forms. There are those who have never taken a product out of a store without paying for it, but Paul – that is, the Holy Spirit – would not let you off the hook that easy.

Have you cheated a little on that IRS form, found loopholes that weren't even there, and thus stolen from the federal government? Then justified yourself with the old saying, "It's not a sin to steal from a thief." Yes it is. It's a sin. Stealing is a sin.

Have you taken extra time on that lunch break, reminding yourself just how lucky the company is to have you as an employee, and how they won't mind an extra ten minutes now and then? Stealing time is stealing money, productivity.

Have you stolen money from God, as Malachi points out? Ten percent is the beginning point, the entry point, into your giving life. It's supposed to go up from there until eventually every penny God gives you somehow is given back to Him for His glory. But have you not even entered into the joy of the ten percent? God loves a joyful giver, but I think He would be happy at first with a joyful tither, one who pays his debt. If you are giving less than that, or nothing, you are robbing God.

The weather is bad on Sunday morning, so people keep the kids or themselves out of church. Monday morning rolls around, and the children find that the same rules do not apply for school days. It is vital that they get their education, but they are robbed on Sundays from their association with the people of God. Stealing life from a child is a pretty serious offense.

You believe the commandment, Thou shalt not steal? And you would tell everyone how true it is. But do you steal? Paul wants to know.

## **2:22**

"You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery?"

We know what Jesus said about that one, right? This command is not just about finding some other woman, while you are married to a woman already, and developing an intimate relationship with her. That is a sin,

still, make no mistake. Jesus brought it further, and placed condemnation, the breaking of God's law, on every man who looks longingly with desire on someone that is not his wife. That is sin and needs to be confessed immediately! Men, if you can't handle your eyes watching those football game commercials and those cheerleaders whose mothers never taught them how to dress properly in a public place, turn it off and listen on the radio.

Private watching of TV and movies is the worst thing that has come along for men trying to be holy before God. When you are in church and around people in general, it's not so easy to look at things you shouldn't be looking at. Your pride kicks in and you don't want anyone to know you have this weakness. But get alone in that room, no one is around. You don't have to turn on the porn channels, although I hear some Christian men are addicted to that. You can get your eyes filled with adultery just watching the game, or Fox News, a channel which features quite a few of the women I described earlier.

You unmarried people are not free from this command. Are you not married to Christ? Does the Spirit of God not dwell in you? Imagine your mind as a hallway where you have posted pictures of the things and people that you value most. Up and down that hallway the Holy Spirit walks and views your art work. There is a picture of Jesus on the cross. Wonderful. There is one of you visiting a hospital and giving comfort to a suffering saint. Excellent! But what is this? A picture of a half-naked woman. In fact, there are several such pictures.

How can the Holy Spirit dwell in such a hallway? Will He not be grieved beyond measure, and be unable to help you in the work you want to do for Him? Tear those images down. Be brutal. Put nothing wicked before your eyes. Let the Holy Spirit enjoy Himself in your house.

How about this one,

"...You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

Now that's a strange question. Perhaps even more hard to understand in the KJV: Do you commit sacrilege?

We know that idolatry was a horrible distraction for the people of Israel, from their days in Egypt, on through the wilderness, and into the promised land. It was in fact the reason that God had to put a halt to the Kingdom via the Babylonian captivity. But since those days, Israel had finally corrected that matter, and had come to a point of abhorrence of idolatry. MacArthur states that because some of the Caesars claimed to be gods, the Jew did not even want to handle a Roman coin on which the image of Caesar was imprinted. To them this was idolatry.

*Ierosuleho* , the word here translated "commit sacrilege" actually means to be a temple robber, from the noun *ierosulos*, a temple despoiler. *Ieros* , a holy place. When you do what the KJV people did, translate it "commit sacrilege", then look up sacrilege, you find that English word comes from the Latin *sacrilegus* , "one who robs sacred property."

The word came to mean, "a violation of what is sacred, consecrated to God, gross irreverence toward a hallowed person, place, or thing." But I believe the original literal meaning is best.

Paul is writing to the Jews in Rome where many temples to false gods flourished. It is a fact that Jews and others would plunder these temples in the name of God but also in the name of money. The gold and silver trappings of a pagan temple could bring in quite a profit on the market. Paul says, "You hate idolatry, but you go and steal from the temples and get rich on these gods you once despised, proving you have another god: gold."

Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote around this time, commanded: "Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem such; nor any one steal what belongs to strange temples, nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god." So there was a problem.

And that problem is underscored in Acts 19:37 where Paul and company are cleared of a possible charge of temple-plundering. The KJV has it wrong there, I believe, talking of church-robbing. The translators lived in a day when the professing church had built temple-like buildings of its own, but no such things existed in first century Ephesus, where this statement is made.

So Paul calls out hypocrisy here. You have given up your gods, but you worship your gold. Can we apply this to ourselves? Have we committed sacrilege? Do we destroy so-called holy things and then replace them with other things that are just as evil?

We love to bash Romanism. And well we should. Romanism, trusting in works and ceremonies and rituals for our salvation, sends people to Hell. The teaching of purgatory and indulgences gives men false hope. Worship of Mary is idolatry indeed. But if you would look around the homes of Protestant Christians, you would find a stack of books with teachings just as bad as Rome's. You would have found in recent years stacks of tapes and cd's [now just a smart phone connected to the internet will do]. Men and women believe that as long as it's not Roman, it's OK. And so the church is filled, not from the pulpit necessarily, but from the pew and the phone, with idolatrous teachings that promise constant health and constant wealth. And spiritual gifts that may not even exist. That promise a salvation that needs no evidence, no fruit. Heretical teachings. Distracting teachings. Teachings that draw men away from their pastor and church to a never-never land paid for by their offerings, which could have blessed the struggling congregation they attend, and instead are often buying yachts and private planes and mansions and corporate headquarters.

So I ask with Paul, in a 21st century way, You abhor Romanism, but do you now love many other isms that are just as deadly to your walk with God? Come out of all of these things and open your Bible.



## 2:23

“You who make your boast in the law...”

Matthew 22:36, a lawyer asks Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment of the law?”

Luke 10:25-27. Another lawyer, another question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus refers him to the law, which he proceeded to quote accurately. Jews rested on the law.

John 7:49. The Pharisees believed that any of the people of Israel who did not know the law were accursed.

John 8:5. Trying to accuse a woman caught in adultery, the scribes and Pharisees appeal to Moses, “Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned.”

John 12:34, “We have heard from the law that Christ remains forever...”

John 19:7, before Pilate the Jews said, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die...”

The Jews indeed rested in their law, boasted in it, held it up as the standard for all.

“... do you dishonor God through breaking the law?”

How to comment on this part of the verse except to say “Yes.” The Jews have broken all the laws of God, even as Gentiles have.

- The first commandments of God regarding idolatry they broke all through their history given in the Old Testament.

- Taking the Lord's name in vain: That's not about cussing, that's about worship: Isaiah 1.

"Bring no more vain sacrifices [but God *ordained* sacrifices] ; incense is an abomination to Me [but God *ordained* incense]... I cannot endure iniquity." Worship in the meetings, but sinful lives.

Jesus and Isaiah: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

- Ezekiel 20 documents the fact that Israel had polluted the sabbaths given them by God.
- Honor your father and mother. Jesus talked about the new way of looking at that command devised by the Jews. If you would just take that money that should have been laid up for your parents, and give it to the synagogue, God would like that better.
- Murder and adultery were now looked at as outward matters, with no searching of the heart for the real reason people kill and are unfaithful.

Israel had been guilty of the worst robbery of all, robbing from God in their giving habits.

- And coveting? After their horrible removal from the land, the Jews trickled back into Israel and Judah. But the ones who got there first began giving out loans with exorbitant interest rates to the ones who came in later. Nehemiah corrected this outrage.

The Jews loved their law but could not obey it. We are no different. Psalm 119, "Oh how love I your law, it is my meditation all the day." But I wonder if the writer of that Psalm kept the law he loved?

**2:24**

“For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ as it is written.”

You may have noticed that Paul’s quotes of the Old Testament are not always exact, and/or they are taken from the Septuagint. There are some paraphrases, and substitutions of words etc. But the sense is always there. Here’s Isaiah 52:5, where this quote comes from, and some of the text surrounding it.

“My people went down at first into Egypt to dwell there; then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now therefore what have I here that My people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them mock them, and My name is blasphemed continually every day.”

The Jews in Egypt had no law. Some of them had turned to idols already, though Yahweh was supposedly their God. Surely the Egyptians looked down on a God that would allow His people to be in bondage all those years. The Assyrians were allowed to come into Israel and take these idolatrous Jews into bondage. How respectful could the Assyrians have been of that same God? The people worshiped some of the same gods that they did, along with their version of Yahweh. The true God was mocked and shamed and blasphemed every day of the week.

Perhaps Ezekiel tells the story even better. He picks it up after the Assyrian captivity. Ezekiel 36:17-20. Again God is speaking:

“Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds; to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity. Therefore I poured out My fury upon them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them

according to their ways and their deeds. When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name – when they said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.’”

Can't you see it? “Hey guys, look at these Jews. God's holy people from God's holy land. But God's kicked them out of the Holy Land. Are you kidding? Holy? About as holy as their God I imagine!”

Every day, every day. And that antisemitism continues to this day. Jews? They're from yesterday. They think they are so great. But their little God will have nothing to do with them. Palestine theirs? Give me a break. God's finished with them. And we're finished with that whole Judeo-Christian religion! What a joke.

Did I just put Christian into the mix? Oh, I know this passage is about Jews, and we want to keep it that way, since Paul is talking to them and about them. But isn't it true that when one calling himself Christian or preacher or evangelist messes up, the world laughs at their God and therefore blasphemes?

Not just the TV folks, people. Us. When we mess up. When the church fights. When immorality is allowed to fester in the church, and the world can't tell the difference between holy church and unholy world. When the music and methods and attitudes inside are no different than the ones outside, what is the world to think? It's obvious. “We don't need you, or your God. You're no better than us. Your divorce rate, your abortions, your drug use, your foolish talk, your obsession with sports and movies and food... why should we follow you or your God?”

Where's Paul going with all this? You say you're a Jew but you don't look like the man described in the law you say you follow. You look like the rest of the world.

But someone in the crowd says, “Yes, but God gave us a mark in our very body to prove we are His. We men were circumcised the eighth day of our lives and have been His special people ever since that day.”

Oh really. Paul’s answers my imaginary but real question in verse 25:

**2:25**

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”

Paul is not trying to suggest the physically impossible. He’s stating a spiritual truth.

The Jews trusted in their heritage. They trusted in their law. And they trusted in circumcision, the sign of the covenant. Paul is about to dynamite all three confidences so he can plant confidence in another way of salvation.

Circumcision. Why? At the risk of being graphic I follow Macarthur here in saying “the very procreative organ needed to be cleansed of a covering.” He makes the point that this symbolic gesture shows that man at his core is sinful and needs cleansing. Like baptism, it was a picture of something. But like baptism, the Jew began to believe that the symbolism was the real thing.

If you were baptized to show God’s forgiveness and cleansing before you were forgiven or cleansed, maybe you need to be baptized again – assuming you have since been forgiven or cleansed.

Circumcision was valuable to the Jew who was keeping the law. It was a signal that he was in covenant relationship with God. It was not the relationship itself, only a symbol of it. So if you keep the law, the symbol is meaningful. Keep breaking the law, what does it mean? Nothing! It’s as though you had not been circumcised.

Once more the prophets come to our assistance, reminding us that Paul's teachings are not his own. The Spirit of God had been saying this for centuries. Here's Jeremiah (9:25-26).

"Behold, the days are coming that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised – Egypt, Judah, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart."

Sounds a lot like Paul.

## **2:26**

"Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law..."

What is Paul saying here?! He has already concluded that Jew and Gentile alike are sinners condemned. And he has just argued again that the Jew who has the law but doesn't do it is condemned. That the Jew who trusts in circumcision but doesn't act like a covenant person is condemned. Where is he going?

Suppose, he says, there was a Gentile who perfectly kept the law of God. Wouldn't he be more acceptable to God than a circumcised Jew who did not keep the law? Just suppose...

"will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?"

Yes, says Paul. Definitely. God is interested in what's on the inside, not the symbolic language of circumcision, Bibles stacked high in your church or home, water baptism, church attendance. That Gentile who obeys Me from the heart is more acceptable than the Jew who does not. Matthew 23 again, speaking to the ruling class of Jews, but to any Jew who had this problem:

“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you pay tithe of the smallest things in your possession, but you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. You strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. You clean the outside of the cup but the inside is full of extortion and self-indulgence. You’re like a whitewashed grave that appears beautiful on the outside, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones.”

Not only that,

## **2:27**

“Will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?”

Serious stuff here. Paul, the Jew, says to his own people, and himself, the former Pharisee, Not only is the Gentile equal to you now, he is above you and will sit in judgment over you. Trouble is, how do we find such a Gentile? That is, a Gentile who fulfills the law?

Thus Paul is setting up his case logically, one step at a time. Chapter 1, and 2:6: All men, Jew and Gentile, are worthy of judgment. But there is a third class of men, 2:7, who will not be judged because they are seeking God and doing good.

Then back to the universal judgment. First the Gentiles, 2:12-15, based on the law in their own hearts. Then the Jew, 2:17-25. who had a written law and a seal in their body. All condemned.

But then that other class, at present a theoretical group: 2:26-27, a class of Gentiles who actually could keep the law without Moses, without circumcision. Then Paul blows away the entire Jewish façade, the stranglehold that the Jews thought they had on God. Yes, they thought God had to save them. God was obligated to save them. They were descended from Abraham. They received the law from Heaven itself via

Moses. They had a seal in their bodies that proved their covenant relation to God. If anyone gets to go to heaven, it's the Jew, they reasoned.

No. You can't say that any longer. In fact, you never could really say it. God was always willing to make exceptions to people who loved Him and loved or feared Israel.

Were there not Egyptians that came out of Egypt with Moses?

Was not a woman who had an all-night business in Jericho saved from destruction, then married to Salmon, father of Boaz? Was she not the great-great-grandmother of David, and thus in the line of Christ?

Was not a Moabite, the sometime-enemy of Israel, accepted into Naomi's household as a daughter? Did she not marry the Jew Boaz, and become the great-grandmother of David, and thus in the line of Christ?

Can we not imagine that many other Gentiles were brought in through the years? Did not Jesus minister to a woman in Phoenicia, and a Roman centurion?

Still the notion continued, in spite of prophecies to the contrary about Gentiles, that the way to salvation was Israel, as opposed to, the God of Israel. May we never fall into the trap of thinking salvation is in our church or our denomination, or in the church universal. Salvation remains right where it has been from the beginning. "Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness."

So Paul is not re-defining Jewishness here, only bringing it back to where God intended it when he says,

**2:28**

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly..."



A breath-taking statement, if you are an orthodox Jew. He says there are many people calling themselves Jews that are not really Jews.

He's not saying, Away with Jews, from now on we are Christians. No, the movement is always towards Israel in the Scripture, not away from it. God has a plan and a purpose and that plan is Israel. Just because there is a false Israel and a false Jew does not take away the status of Israel and Judaism in the heart of God. God loves Israel, the Israel He saw from the foundation of the world, the kingdom that shall rule under Jesus for one thousand years, the people of God. God's not done with Israel, but we must define Israel and Jews as Paul defines them: Perfectly obedient people who have the law written in their hearts.

Yes, remember, Jeremiah 31 about the New Covenant, was written by a Jew, to Jews, and fulfilled in the Jews, starting on the Day of Pentecost. The promise of the Holy Spirit was first given by a Jew, to the Jews. Peter, the Christian who just happened to be a Jew, quotes Joel in his first "Christian" sermon, a very Jewish sermon.

Remember that this Jewish sect called Christian was not even called Christian until Antioch, and then there is no evidence that it was a God-ordained word. God's program for Israel continues, but it is the true Israel we seek.

Nearly one hundred years into the church's history, John is entrusted with a letter to several churches. In one of them there were people claiming to be apostles, who were not apostles. We have the same issue today. Ephesus was all over that. I wish we could eliminate it today.

Then there were people, blasphemers, saying they were Jews, but were not. I believe that they were the same people Paul is speaking of here. How can a true Jew kill God in the flesh? How can a true Jew reject those filled with the Spirit of God? How can a true Jew not recognize the apostles as their own people and cling only to the first covenant? Simple answer. They are not true Jews.

Outward claims to being a Jew are no longer enough. Manifest your Jewishness by what is on the inside.

“... nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.”

Circumcision no longer counts unless you can keep the law of Moses in that same body that has been circumcised. And you can't.

Who are the true Jews?

## **2:29**

“But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter...”

Another mouthful from Paul. More information added. More complication, to some. You want to prove to me you are a true Jew? You may be circumcised already. You may be a card-carrying Jew, as was Paul. There's nothing wrong with that. But Paul will tell you, that card is not your ticket in. Something must happen to your heart. Somehow the Spirit of God must transform you, or you are not a Jew in the God sense.

Let me say it again. In God's eyes, according to what we have just read, there are no Jews on the earth except those who have been filled with the Spirit of God and forgiven of their sins, that is, circumcised in their heart. The evil is gone, the good is in. God lives in that man or woman or child, and he is a true Jew. All others are imposters.

The “letter” of the law, as Paul will bring out in other passages, can only kill. Why? To be a slave of the letter and fail in one point, condemns a man forever. You cannot keep the law of God, not even that short list of ten. God must write His law on your heart so that you want to keep it and therefore you do keep it. God changes your wants and desires into His

own. How many stories of drug addicts who suddenly did not want any drugs? Or cigarette? Or alcohol? Or the wrong kind of sexual pleasure?

The true Jew is the Spirit-filled born again Jew. He does not cease to be a Jew! In fact he becomes a true Jew. You will not see the word “Christian” in Paul’s words. “Oh, just leave the synagogue and come over to our building.” No.

We ask Catholics to leave Rome and come to our meetings. Our meetings don’t save people. No church saves. No building is magical. People must be born again before they can understand what we are about here. A true Jewishness,

“...whose praise is not from men, but from God.”

Remember “Judah”, praise? He was blessed originally because he was going to be the one that people would praise. And Judah became that man and that tribe and that nation. And people praised the Jew because of his many exploits.

Paul turns that around a little too. Even the name “Jew” is now to stand for the fact that not only will men love the tribe of Judah, and its Lion, but God Himself will honor the true Jew.

### **3:1**

“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?”

Try to ignore the chapter division here. The flow of thoughts continues. And understand that when he uses the term “Jew” here, Paul is using it generically to include physical and true Jew. Macarthur adds to the question Paul poses, assuming Paul is answering a question that a good Jew might ask after reading the end of chapter 2. I quote him here:

“If our Jewish heritage, our knowing and teaching the Mosaic law, and our following Jewish rituals such as circumcision do not make a Jew righteous before God, then, “what advantage” do we have? Why is it good to be a Jew?

Macarthur points out here a history of the Jewish people’s sufferings. I will abbreviate it, but I think it is a good idea to bring it in here, heightening the import of Paul’s question in 3:1. “Look at all we’ve gone through! What advantage do we have?” This they could well ask.

Tevey in Fiddler on the Roof says in response to some negative events in old Russia among the Jews there, words to the effect of, “God, you say we are the chosen people. Couldn’t you choose someone else for a while?”

Jewish history:

- Slaves in Egypt four hundred years.
- Wandering in a barren wilderness for forty years.
- Civil war divides the nation.
- The northern section of Israel captured by the Assyrians.
- The southern kingdom of Judah decimated by the Babylonians.
- After they regroup and rebuild they are conquered by Greece and their temple desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes.
- Conquered by Rome.
- Jewish babies slaughtered by Herod the Great.
- A.D. 70. Roman general Titus destroys Jerusalem, kills one million.
- 115 A.D. Emperor Hadrian kills half a million Jews.
- 380 A. D. Theodosius declares Jews to be an inferior race.
- For two centuries, Jews oppressed by Byzantine branch of the Empire.
- 628, Emperor Heroclitus banishes them from Jerusalem and tried to exterminate them.

- 1096, Roman Catholic Crusades slaughter thousands of Jews on their way to Jerusalem, trampling them to death under their horses hooves. In the name of Jesus.
- 1254. All Jews banished from France.
- 1492. Expelled from Spain.
- 1496. Expelled from Portugal.
- 1818. Thousands massacred in the Ukraine.
- 1940s. Six million Jews exterminated.

No security for the Jews anywhere. But if Romans 2 is correct, they had no spiritual security either. They trusted all this time in a God they had rejected. They trusted in their circumcision, in their heritage, and perhaps even in their suffering.

What are we trusting in tonight? Our Christian heritage? Our church? Our water baptism? Our suffering? Persecution suffering is a norm for true Christians but the fact that one is suffering does not mean that that person has earned favor with God. Be very sure.

What advantage then, in being Jewish, if being Jewish means you have a law you cannot keep and will be punished for it? What advantage if you have a heritage you cannot claim? God had said to His people, “the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” “The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession.” “The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise.”

And when they walked in obedience, such was the case. But when their hearts were hardened, as Pharaoh’s and Emperors after him, God showed He is no respecter of persons. Israel, except for a remnant, would perish like all the others.

Paul brings out later in the chapter that ultimately God has not abandoned His people. Ultimately all Israel will be saved. But the Israel

which is according to the flesh will continue to endure unheard of misery in answer to its own prayer during the trial of Jesus: "His blood be on us, and on our children." So it has been.

Let me pause here to speak about a great controversy that has arisen in the Christian Church regarding Israel. On the one hand the claim has been made that Israel exists no longer. The church is here now, and Israel is to be forgotten altogether. It is no more special than any other Middle Eastern nation. Loved, pitied, preached to, but written off of God's program for the future.

On the other hand are those who swear by modern Israel and everything she does.

Historically there have been those who so hate the Jewish people as to rejoice in their sufferings, and add to those sufferings whenever they can. Conspicuous among the latter is the Roman Catholic system, which only recently has – at least publicly and outwardly – apologized for its attitude toward the Jew and Israel. The Crusades, the forced wearing of yellow stars to single them out as a cursed people (Hitler did not originate that) the silence during the Holocaust, the fostering of attitudes that have prejudiced a world against Jewish people, all atrocities to God, yet used of God to fulfill His own words against them.

What I just said is a mystery, I understand. How can God be angry with Romanism when Romanism is carrying out His will? *The same way He punished Babylon and Assyria for their treatment of Israel while delivering Israel into their hands.*

We must not see the suffering of Israel as some cosmic accident that caught God off guard and surprised Him. When Israel was faithful, Israel was successful. From the Nile to the Euphrates, that was the promise, and during the days of David and Solomon that was the reality.

But Israel repeatedly soured on God until in its hardness it did the unthinkable, turning against their God-sent Messiah, who happened to be God Almighty.

And yet, as through the ages Israel persisted, thanks to God's forgiveness and mercy and healing, Israel persists today. What we see in the Middle East today is not what we will see in the Millennium. The Israel of the Millennium will all acknowledge Jesus as King. The present crop of Israelites is far from such a thing.

But Israel persists.

Living throughout most of the nineteenth century was one Horatius Bonar, a Scottish Presbyterian minister. What I am about to share of his writings places I believe the proper balance on this whole Israel question that Paul is about to delve into in Romans. Israel is being cursed. Israel is blessed. Not either or. Both. If we can get on both sides of this argument we'll see there is no argument.

I was told about a video I should watch about Israel. It spelled out the case of the "Replacement" people. I was impressed. Many Scriptures on that side. Then I studied it on my own. Not so clear a case. Then I received the October edition of Herald of His Coming. Total opposite attitude. It was great too, but mishandled a few Scriptures, in my opinion.

And there in a nutshell is the problem with Bible "issues" and mysteries. Are you Trinitarian or do you believe in "Oneness"? Calvinist or Arminian? Pretrib or Posttrib? The honest student of the Word will find Scriptures on both sides of all those differences. But honesty and persistence will drive him on to find that both cannot be true. One will prevail. But not because one is the only one we look at. We must look at both sides. Pray. Dig. Ask. Then decide.

Same in this issue. Israel cursed or blessed? Israel finished or just getting started? Israel is the church or just a part of the church? My approach will

be to tackle verses one at a time as we come to them in Romans. For if ever there was a portion of Scripture outside of the Old Testament that deals with Israel, it is this letter we are studying now.

The opening salvo is 2:18, talking about true Jews, and Gentiles that are equal to them, when the Spirit is in both. That's all we know so far. We haven't mentioned prophecies, the land in the Middle east, the remnant, the 144,000, their place in the church. Only that it is possible to be outwardly Jewish and not be a Jew in God's sight at all. And now He mentions a distinct advantage that was given to the Jews. But first, that extended quote from Bonar, written one hundred years before there was anything like a State of Israel, by the way:

"In Israel we see the standing memorial of Jehovah's faithfulness and truth. Nothing has failed of all that the Lord had said that He would do for or against that people... the curse has gone forth against them and every threat has been verified. Yet they are not consumed; they are still beloved for their fathers' sakes, and preserved because of the covenant which cannot be broken... monuments now of God's righteous severity, they are yet to be more signal monuments of His unchanging grace...Tossed from billow to billow upon a single plank, they have weathered centuries of storm, seeing the mightiest vessels part anchor in the blast and go down at their side, themselves buoyant still.

"What faithfulness, what patience, what unchanging love. In Jehovah's eyes they are precious still... The covenant abideth sure; their promises are imperishable. Were it not for them, where had they been? Would they not have perished from the earth, and been found no more among the nations?... Through all these 1800 years they have been sustained as a nation, emerging from the smoke and ruin of a thousand cities, rising out of the fragments of a hundred empires, surviving with mysterious tenacity of life, the storm, the sack, the massacre, the flood, the flame! [and Bonar knew nothing of Hitler and the Holocaust.]



“If anything could humble us Gentiles, it would be the history of the destiny of the slighted Jew... was ever a nation so mysteriously indestructible? Plunged into the furnace of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Grecian, Roman [including Papal Roman] tyranny, it has come forth unconsumed! Kingdom after kingdom has crumbled down, or been swallowed up, yet Israel has walked secure over the debris of empires... the outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah will return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads....

“The history of Israel, in every age, preaches to us the Gospel of the grace of God. It is throughout, the story of man’s sin and of God’s deep and untiring love. It shows us how manifold, how endless are man’s ways of sinning; and it shows us how still more manifold and endless are God’s ways of forgiving, and loving, and blessing. Israel is the nation in which man’s rebellion, man’s wickedness, man’s hatred of God, are brought most clearly out to view, that we may know what man is, even in his best estate, and with every possible advantage.”

I must add here that this assessment of Israel must apply to the present government in the present Israel. Israel remains anti-Christ. We must never become antisemitic, but we must recognize that Israel after the flesh, whether in the first or the twenty-first century, is the enemy of God, and must be dealt with as all enemies of God, according to Jesus: prayer, love, and the preaching of the Gospel. Not Rome’s way of humiliation, persecution, death, torture.

Back to Bonar’s assessment of this unmatched people:

“Around her prophecy clusters; and upon her the world’s destinies seem to hinge. Her past exaltation, her present abasement, and her future glory, are all most mysteriously woven into the world’s history, past, present, and to come.”

And one more quote, from another work of Bonar, reminding us once more that it is not Israel we praise, but Israel’s God...

“In the Jewish nation God hath written out His glorious name. In them we see every divine perfection of God in act and operation... Omnipotence raised them up at first. Then countless multitudes sprang from a dead stock. “Wisdom watched over, led, and guided them unerringly.

“Faithfulness fulfilled every promise uttered by the lips of truth. Goodness established them in a noble land, gave them holy laws...sent among them prophets to teach and priests to minister.

“Holiness warned, cautioned, and exhorted them, and when they rebelliously spurned the gentle tones of love, how long did Patience bear with them...

“When they had consummated the rebellions of fifteen hundred years by that unparalleled deed of blood, the murder of the Son of God, then, after some yet further lingerings and invitations of insulted mercy (book of Acts), did awful justice arise, bared His arm for the battle, and dealt down terrible and crushing blows.

“Now (1800’s) in what state do we behold them? Even as they have been for the last eighteen hundred years, like a burnt mountain on the plains of Time, scorched and splintered by the lightnings of divine wrath...

“Yes! Still preserved in all their woe, still unconsumed by all these penal fires! Preserved! And for what? Let a thousand glorious prophecies answer! That burnt mountain shall yet be clothed with lovely verdure; down its sides shall streams of living water gush... Then shall the Lord be glorified in Israel, and all His attributes displayed in full-orbed glory, when He shall call her ‘Hephzibah’ and her land ‘Beulah’.”

Amen, Horatius Bonar.

Paul would agree that there really is an advantage to the Jew, if he will claim it. Let’s see what advantage Paul is talking about in verse 2:

### 3:2

“Much every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”

The *logion*. That’s the greatest advantage any man can have. The sayings. The very words of God. You can hear *logos* in that word. It’s very closely related and can be used interchangeably. Unfortunately, “oracles” conjures up pictures of witchcraft and demonic utterances. And rightly so. The enemy has a lot of things to say and he says them through dark powers on earth. The ancients knew of their oracles, for sure.

But Paul here is speaking of the very words that proceeded from the mouth of God to Moses, and in one case by His own finger on tablets of stone. Those words have been passed on through the generations and we have them today still intact. Stephen mentions the same word in telling his history of Israel, Acts 7:38,

“This is he [Moses] who received the living oracles to give to us.”

How often do we cry out, Lord, speak to me! Show me your will! I can’t hear you! If we listen carefully, quite often the Lord will simply say, Open the book I gave you. My will is there. I have already spoken, through the prophets, through the apostles. Just open.

Paul doesn’t continue his list, you will note. He says, “There is great advantage in being a Jew...” and you think he is going to list all the advantages. But he gets to number one and stops because that says it all. If you have the Word of God Himself, what more do you need? What an advantage!

Imagine a baseball game. Two men. One has studied all the rules of baseball, knows all the ins and outs, he steps up to the plate, hits a home run, circles the bases, the crowd cheers.

The other man. Well the team was desperate. They needed nine guys and this guy was free for the day so they added him to the roster. Never seen a baseball game. Never read about it. Knows nothing. He steps up to the plate, holding his bat upside down. The pitcher pitches one right past him. But he saw the other guy run around the bases when the pitcher pitched the ball. So he starts running, too. He is tagged out, but doesn't like the idea that someone on the other team is hitting him with his glove. So he hits him back, and...

Do you see how knowing the rules is a great advantage. More serious, and more realistic:

Two boys come to a church Sunday School. One knows the Bible, understands the songs. The other is clueless. The leader begins to sing, and the group joins in, "Smile awhile and give your face a rest..." Well, that's a cute thing. The new guy smiles with the others. "Raise your hand to the one Who loves you best..." Boy one and the others lift their hands to the Lord. The clueless boy raises his hand to the cute girl on the other side of the church, whose favor he has been trying to win.

Don't laugh. It really happened. Circa 1954-55. The clueless guy was me.

What an advantage to know the rules. To know the Word. To have in our hands the very revelation of God Almighty. To know secrets that no one else knows. To be privy to mysteries and in some cases their unfolding. To look at creation and know where and when and how it came about. To look at myself and know why I am here and where I am going. To have wisdom. Comfort in the night. Joy in the morning.

And all this started with the Jews. Sixty-six separate portions of Scripture. Almost all of them given to Jews and passed to us. The oracles of God. The sayings of God. The words and thoughts of God. What an advantage, Israel!

**3:3**

“For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?”

The Jews have an advantage. This we understand. They have the words of God. They have the promises of God. Like what? Isaiah 2, “The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains... and all nations shall flow to it.” A Jewish state? “People will come and say, ‘Come and let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob?’” A worldwide Jewish religion in the future? “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” A Jewish monarchy? “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people.” A kingdom ruled by Israel?

Yes. Israel has a future. I’m not speaking of the present Jewish government but the one that is to come, ruled by the Jew Jesus. God is faithful. God will keep His promises to Israel. Nothing can stop it!

But does that mean that every individual Jew that ever lived is going to be magically saved on that day? Will the wicked kings of Israel in the northern kingdom be there? Will everyone get a second chance, because he is Jewish? Or is the promise a national promise?

Paul has already told us that to be a Jew means to be filled with God’s Spirit, living out the law from the heart. That concept must be kept in mind as we travel on, or we make serious mistakes in interpretation. Israel will be saved. Israel will triumph. Israel will rule the world through its Messiah. But unbelieving men called Jews will not be there on that day.

Paul says it here. Some did not, and will not, believe. But Israel goes on.

### **3:4**

“Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar...”

“May it not be!” Is the actual Greek word’s translation here, not “God forbid!” or “Certainly not!”. It cannot be. Impossible thought! Don’t ever let it cross your mind that God is not going to be faithful to Israel. As we

saw earlier, it is easy to see her punishment, but see also her preservation and know that God cannot lie. Again in Isaiah, chapter 12, we read:

“In that day,” – the day of the Lord when He reigns as described in Isaiah 11 – “you [Jews] will say, ‘O Lord I will praise you; though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away, and you comfort me’... in that day you will say, ‘Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His deeds among the people... sing to the Lord, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth!’”

Many Jews will die in unbelief. That will not change the faithfulness of God to His people Israel.

Any man who dares come against God is a liar. Everyone who questions God’s integrity, God’s promises, God’s faithfulness, is a liar. Regardless of how improbable the proposition, Israel will one day overcome and repent, and be the source of everything good on earth.

She is not now. She is still being wounded now, and her wounds will increase before that great day. Jacob’s Trouble comes to the earth. But Jacob’s blessing follows soon after.

“As it is written, ‘That you may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.’”

That’s Psalm 51:4. David’s cry of repentance. The first part of that verse has David confessing that it was against God alone that David had sinned. Not Bathsheba? Not Uriah the Hittite and his family? Not the nation of Israel, shamed before its enemies? No. Only against God. And David hastens to explain what he means. That explanation is the section of the verse that Paul quotes.

The Psalm uses the active “when You judge.” David seems to say that whatever the sentence against him, God, who was the One offended, has the right to exact that sentence. He will be justified in whatever he does. I submit to His judgment.

Paul is quoting from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew that was common in his day. The outcome of the meaning is the same, though the passive “when You are judged” is used. That is, God, when you make a judgment, it is true, and if someone opposed you, “judges You”, You still are true, You overcome their judgment.

So even when we sin, as unbelief in this passage is sin, God’s truth and judgment rise so high above us that God still looks good. We are the losers when we do not believe. We are the losers when we do not obey. God continues to overcome. Our badness just illuminates His goodness. As MacArthur says, it’s like the merchant who displays a gold band on a black cloth so that the gold looks even more beautiful. Which leads us to verse 5.

### **3:5**

“But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust Who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)”

Paul seems to be on a side path here. He was telling us what a true Jew looks like, and a false Jew, then asking what advantage the Jews as a whole, had. Now he is tracing unbelief of the Jews and how their unbelief has only worked against them.

Notice the series of questions and answers that lawyer Paul advances: What advantage does the Jew have? Will Jewish unbelief negate the faithfulness of God? Is God just to punish a person who has just made Him look good?

This last question borders on blasphemy and Paul hurriedly adds that he doesn’t believe a word of that! He is speaking as carnal men speak: “Hey, you just said that every time I sin, I’m making God look good! So why does He get so upset with Me? How can He punish me for making Him look good with my sin?” Evil, evil thinking. Don’t think like this.

Paul has another question to answer this one:

**3:6.**

“Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?”

Paul uses the same word in verse 6 as in verse 3, “Let it not be!”

Unthinkable! Are you kidding? You better believe God is just to punish, to inflict wrath! Never doubt it. Never soften up on this matter. Sin is awful! Sin sent God to a Roman cross. How bad does it have to get?

If God cannot punish you because of your making Him look good by your sin, how will He ever judge the world one day? Each person’s sin would have to be overlooked. Instead, God would have to offer a thank-you. “I want to thank you for your great contribution to my greatness. Others were praising Me, serving Me, loving Me, and making Me look great that way. But you sinned so magnificently that people looked at my holiness and were in awe of it. Why, I owe you a great round of applause. Bless you for your sins!

Such absurdity! Let it not be!

Don’t misunderstand. I know it seems at times, as in Psalm 73, that the wicked are indeed being blessed in their sinfulness. Don’t you believe it. Do what the Psalmist did. Consider their end. So unpleasant a thought.

Paul is not convinced he has made his point, so he goes on with it for two more verses. Let’s go with him:

**3:7**

“For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?”

This is a restatement of verse 5. For “unrighteousness” in general Paul suggests a particular sin, that of lying. Suppose I am a liar. I lie so much and so horribly that the truth stands out in bold relief. The cults are good at this. Satan has twisted the thinking of cultists to the point that they say the very opposite of what God said to begin with.



Every elementary student of Scripture knows that “the Word was God,” that Jesus said He was the “I Am,” and was almost stoned for blasphemy, that He claimed to be one with the Father. So-called “witnesses” come along and say we should call Him “a” god, that He didn’t really make the claims we know He made. Their foolish interpretations of Scripture, practically ridiculed by true Bible scholars, just make us believe God more. Same with the Mormon fantasies and the theory of evolution and every lie that has attacked the truth of God’s Word.

When we study their lies, our faith increases in the truth and we love God more. So should God excuse those who lie against Him on that basis? Hey, your attacks have increased the love of My true people, thank you. I have decided not to judge you since your imagination has increased my honor.

Not gonna happen. Unrepentant liars will have their part in the lake of fire, period.

In verse 8, Paul summarizes the whole issue by sharing a personal attack on his team.

### **3:8**

“And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? – as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.”

Paul was not accepted by all believers. That’s important for us to remember. Many did not support him in his final days before the Roman courts. Many ridiculed him, abandoned him, put him down, to put themselves up. These were the brothers. Not to mention the unbelievers.

Paul preached in churches what he is now writing to the Romans. He taught, among other things, that the Jewish people were blessed of God on the one hand, and filled with unbelief and disobedience on the other.

That is the balance we must keep, by the way, as we continue our study of the mystery called Israel. A faithful God vs an unfaithful people.

Teaching such a strange message brought forth the attacks he is listing. Jewish disobedience did not destroy Israel, so why shouldn't the rest of us be disobedient too? Why shouldn't we do evil, and if we do evil long enough and well enough, good is going to come from it. That's what Paul is preaching and he's a fool for it.

Paul, characteristically outspoken and firm and, simply says, people who say that are damned, and rightly so. How dare they accuse me of teaching that and how dare they accuse God of doing that! He is holy, and every sin will be dealt with. Israel will pay the price, but that doesn't keep God from loving her to the core. Look at Isaiah 49:15.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands..."

How do you forget something that is written on your hands?!

**3:9**

"What then? Are we better than they?"

Therefore, what? I've just shown you that, in spite of their sin, God chose Israel and gave them a very specific advantage, namely the words of God Himself! What have I proved?

That we are better? Please note that the words for "than they" are not in the Greek. That's why "than they" is in italics. Paul simply asks, the Jews have an advantage, but are we better? Paul is a Jew and seems to include himself in the question. Are we better, even with this advantage of having Scripture, better than the Gentiles?

Think of it yourself. The people who know the most Bible, are they intrinsically better, I mean when you look at their heart? Is knowledge of the Word the basis for acceptance with God? Jews had and knew the Scriptures. Are they better?

“Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.”

Where did he do this previously? In 1:18, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” All. 2:8, 9, “... indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek...”

Notice “previously charged” or “proved already”. That’s a legal term. Paul is making a case here. I have proved my point, Jews and Greeks are equally guilty, they are all under sin.

“Under” sin. Sin is on top, dominating, controlling, directing. Like in a wrestling match, you weigh 120 pounds, your opponent is 150. He floors you, and sits on you. You are going nowhere. This is sin. An opponent you cannot defeat. You are under him, going nowhere. There’s only one possibility for Jew or Gentile, and Paul is getting ready to share it with his readers, but first an appeal to Scripture to back up his case even more strongly: Psalm 14.

Note that he has already appealed to the creation and its fall, the history of evil men, the idea of conscience, the equality of Jews and Gentiles, the ineffectiveness of the law and circumcision and heritage, and he keeps coming up with the same conclusion: men are sinners. Still don’t believe it? The final court of appeal, “It is written,”

### **3:10**

“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no not one;’”

Macarthur refers to this section as an indictment, a multi-count indictment against fallen man. The first indictment is that sinfulness is universal.

He quotes a Spirit-filled King named David as his authority. This is Psalm 14, a Psalm remarkable in that it is repeated almost word for word in Psalm 53. As Paul quotes the first three verses here, I will give the fuller quotation side by side, so you can get the depth of the meaning David heard from God.

The entire quote of Psalm 14:1: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have done abominable works," and then the point Paul is trying to make, "there is none who does good." None. Paul adds the "no not one" to be sure we get the point.

God's standard is perfect righteousness. To get near God you must be as righteous as He is. He accepts nothing less. Paul will tell us later how to get that righteousness added to our account, but fallen man knows nothing of this. They will all freely admit, Well, no one is perfect. And that's the problem. Not perfect? Then, lost forever. One unforgiven sin keeps you out of heaven. Only one. The very best of men have sinned. The very worst of men have sinned a lot. But it's all the same to God. Sin keeps us from God and heaven.

Macarthur imagines a jumping contest between serious athletes. They are all located on a south seas island, and the idea is to jump over the water to the United States. Some jump ten, fifteen, twenty-five feet. Some not in shape hardly jump at all. None of them make it to the American mainland. Does it matter how much better one athlete is than the other?

You say, what a ridiculous analogy. Yes, the analogy is insufficient to show how ridiculous it is to think we can get to heaven by being a good moral athlete. Sin puts a wide gulf between us and God. Some might be those 25-foot people but so what? We all fall far short, as Paul will conclude later.

Psalm 14 goes on in verse 2, "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God." And the implication is there aren't any in either category, so Paul summarizes that verse as you see it in verse Romans 3:11.

### **3:11**

"There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God."

You say, that doesn't sound so bad, not understanding. Maybe the poor man never had a Bible or a Bible teacher. Maybe he had a bad parenting experience. And on and on we go making excuses for ignorance, where there are no excuses for ignorance, and ignorance itself is not an excuse for not following after God. Paul has already nailed this problem to the ground in chapter one where he talks of all men "suppressing" the truth that he has. Conscience.

You're driving down the street, the sign says 35, and you go 40 and say to yourself, "They don't really care about that." Your conscience is now retrained as you suppress the knowledge of the truth. Before that process is over, you're going 50 and 60 down that same road, until mercifully an officer pulls you over and gives you a ticket to the policeman's party. That may shake your conscience into re-forming again.

And Nature. You see a mountain and know that that mountain did not come there by itself, but you suppress that idea because it may lead you to thinking there is Someone greater than you who may have a right to your life, and you can't have that hanging over you.

And Scripture. Thus saith the Lord. But with Satan you ask, Did God really say that? And you excuse yourself once more on the basis of your higher intellect that doesn't accept mythology and fairy tales like Santa Claus and Jesus.

There's truth out there, and man doesn't want to know about it. His ignorance is self-induced. Man has a disposition toward evil and away from God. We call that depravation. Free will, yes, but inability to choose correctly.

None who seek after God, say David and Paul. Ignorant because He doesn't ask God for understanding. Ignorant because he knows there are better things available for him but he wallows in his self-satisfaction and contentment with the physical world and its supposed comforts.

A man who seeks God will understand more and more about himself, his need, and eventually the solution to his sin problem. But among the people of the world, not one person is so inclined. Now that is an indictment! Spiritual ignorance.

### **3:12**

"They have all turned aside..."

Psalm 14:3 reads the same way. And the Greek *ekklino* "gone out of the way" in the KJV has to do with deviating from the norm. A soldier running the wrong way, even deserting. Here's the way, here's the road. But this person says, "No way," I'll go my own path thank you.

Isaiah 53:6 concurs, "All we like sheep have gone astray." Following the wrong shepherd, or no shepherd at all except self. Follow any shepherd but Jesus and you will go astray. You will get lost and stay lost forever. There is a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof are the ways of death, says Solomon (Proverbs 14:12).

Paul says with David, everyone has gone down that way that leads to death. Everyone, that is, except those who were called by grace back to the main Road, the Way of the cross, the Way that is Jesus.

"...they have together become unprofitable..."

The word means “spoiled” as in milk or eggs, or children. Worthless. When they sit long enough in the wrong places and get no attention, they are ruined. Milk and eggs? Yes. Children? yes.

The whole human race? Yes. Sit long enough in the world, surrounded by the enemy’s people, the enemy’s philosophies, the enemies world-view, all of which is available every minute in our day via the media, and you will become worthless. Spoiled. Needing to be tossed.

Did not Jesus say, and this is a warning to His people, John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned”? Abide, hang around, the world, you will become unprofitable to God, worthless to God and man. The only remedy is staying as close as possible to Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Paul then uses one more segment from Psalm 14 to summarize what he has said so far:

“... there is none who does good, no, not one.”

And everyone in the Christian audience says, Whoa! I can think of one! Jesus, the sinless, spotless Son of God. True. But with one problem. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, following the Greek text literally, “Him who knew not sin [Jesus], for us sin He [Father] made, that we might become righteousness of God in him.” We become righteousness because He becomes sin.

Jesus was not a sinner. But in some way we can’t imagine or appreciate, on that day at Calvary He became sin and even tasted death.

That’s how despicably evil the human race is. There is none that does good, no not one. And the one who kept Himself pure and sinless even bore the weight of sin. We are fallen.

Now if you didn't know better, looking at the text in Romans, assuming verses 10 to 18 are in italics, you would think Paul goes on with Psalm 14. But actually, he switches to another Psalm in verse 13. Go to Psalm 5:9.

"For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue."

As you see, he only quotes the latter part of that verse. Then he goes to yet another passage.

### **3:13**

"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit..."

The picture is revolting, disgusting. But so is the tongue of man, the organ of the voice that begins in the throat. Imagine a grave. A corpse in the grave. No casket. Just a dead body in a pit. And a few days. What awful sights and odors will emanate from that hole as flesh decays. Mankind in general has a similar problem.

Imagine an open mouth. A wicked heart, decayed from sin. Corrupt. Filthy. And out of that heart come sounds that are just as revolting and disgusting as the odors from an open grave. I heard much of this on my "adopted" street corner where I handed out Christian literature. I went home feeling dirty some evenings. You've heard it, I'm sure.

But wait. Paul is including everyone in this indictment. Except the born again. But even the born again at times fall into this trap. James says the tongue cannot be tamed. It's a universal problem. A man with a tamed tongue is a perfect man. Words produce anger. Words produce enticement. Words defame God Himself. Words belittle. Words accuse. Every man or woman has used such words at one time or another, and will again if he is pushed far enough. The tongue is the mirror of the heart.



Talk long enough and we know who you are, a corrupt fallen human being.

Paul says that these tongues lie. Remember David said in haste, "All men are liars." He was angry. Maybe he had just been lied to. But Paul is not angry here, nor is the Spirit-inspired David whose work he quotes. All men are liars. And all women and children too. We deceive ourselves into thinking this and that about life and ourselves and we pass on that false information to others via these tongues.

The indictments keep coming down. Good news is coming. But not before he buries us all in guilt and shame. He now jumps to Psalm 140, verse 3:

"... the poison of asps is under their lips."

The KJV "adder" in this passage is corrected to "asp" in the NKJV, and seems to be the Septuagint usage. There is another word for "adder" in the Old Testament. Both the Hebrew and the Greek suggest a word that means to "coil" like a serpent would do, and both conclude that the writer is referencing the asp.

So what's an asp? Webster says it is a small venomous snake of Egypt, usually held to be a cobra.

So we dig a little deeper and find this Wikipedia description of the poison of the Egyptian cobra, which like all cobras has that expanded head that seems to be a cape, part of its way of intimidating an enemy:

"The venom of the Egyptian cobra... yield is 175 to 300 mg in a single bite... The venom affects the nervous system, stopping the nerve signals from being transmitted to the muscles and at later stages stopping those transmitted to the heart and lungs as well, causing death due to complete respiratory failure. Envenomation causes local pain, severe swelling, bruising, blistering, necrosis and variable non-specific effects which may

include headache, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, dizziness, collapse or convulsions...”

Poison that kills with a single bite. Poison under their lips. What’s under your lips? Your tongue. The “little member that boasts great things... the unruly evil full of deadly poison... we bless God and we curse men” with this same organ, says James.

Paul is not done yet. Still talking about our words, Paul jumps to Psalm 10:7, which reads, “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.”

### **3:14**

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

The word for cursing here has to do with prayer. What’s the connection between prayer and cursing? Prayer is just talking to God or someone who you believe has power to answer. So we can say, God bless my friend, God help me and so on. We can also say, God, curse this person. The words we call “curse words” are often derived from prayers. In anger a man may say, may God damn you. That’s a curse. God strike him down and send him to hell. A prayer, but a curse at the same time.

“Bad words,” as we like to call them, are not curse words. Cussing is not cursing, though the former word came from the latter. To curse is to call down God’s disfavor on some other human being. As the witches recently tried to put a curse on Judge Kavanaugh of the Supreme Court.

Using impolite or graphic words is not cursing, it is being impolite and graphic and should have no part of a Christian’s vocabulary. But cursing is far worse. If you as a Christian ever utter a curse, you better be sure it lines up with God’s word. I regularly curse, and ask God to curse, the work that goes on inside the Admiral Theater in Chicago’s Albany Park. When that place is emptied out, I want that building to be used for God’s

people, much as the Times Square Church in New York was formerly a place of carnality and is now a place of the Spirit.

But I am careful not to curse people, only the work they do there. You'll find David involved in serious judgment of evil in the Psalms. And those curses he brings down will come to pass on unrepentant men.

But notice that cursing and bitterness are mentioned in the same breath here, though not necessarily by David. David mentions bitterness in Psalm 64:3, and perhaps Paul is just including that with cursing because of his own mental connection. That Psalm says,

"[the wicked] sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows – bitter words..."

Cursing and bitterness. Angry depressed hurting people who have lost sight of anything or anyone good. Life has not been what they thought it would be. They got left behind in the mad rush to success. Bitterness settles in. And out of the mouth of a bitter person comes a condemnation of all those around them. They blame other races. They curse the government. They accuse their family members, their neighborhood, their education. And God.

And remember. No one is excepted from this tendency. Bitterness and the resultant bitter words of cursing and blame can come out of any one of us if the situation seems to demand it. Be on your guard.

### **3:15**

"Their feet are swift to shed blood;"

Paul now leaves David for a while and quotes from David's son Solomon in Proverbs 1:16, speaking of sinners whose "feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood."

Isaiah uses similar words in chapter 59.

The human race is a murderous race. Think cannibalism in some primitive tribes over the centuries. Consider mass executions, as of the Jews and other unwanted people. Communism and Nazism have massacred untold millions of people. The Roman church was responsible for many murders during its dark ages.

Macarthur says that since 1900, twice as many of America's citizens have been "slain in private acts of murder than have been killed in all the wars of its entire history." Think of war itself. Think of abortion's slaughter of the innocents. Think of the anger and prejudice in the human heart and Paul's indictment of all humans as murderers begins to ring true.

He's still not finished.

He continues on with Isaiah 59:7, 8. "Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways. They have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace."

That's boiled down in

**3:16, 17**

"Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known."

Destruction the cause, misery the effect, of human ways. The thief comes to steal, obviously. But in stealing he has to kill to make his getaway. And in the process he destroys. As a bank robbery I watched on an old *Bonanza*. The safe is blown open, the money is taken, people are killed in the process. And the people who were counting on that money being there for their future needs, they are destroyed.

As the enemy, so those whose hearts are toward the enemy. Men destroy one another's property, one another's hopes, one another's futures. Our goal is to survive and we will run down everything in our pathway for that to happen. Our streets and the streets of cities across the nation are filled with the miserable ones whose lives have been destroyed by fellow human beings who sold to them destroying substances for their bodies, or sold them a bill of goods about safe sex and feigned friendship and bad business deals that turned out to be all lies.

Destruction and misery. Our trademarks as humans.

As for peace. Humans have never known peace. Jesus tells us that as early as the days of Noah the earth was filled with violent men committing acts of violence. Before that we read of Cain and Abel. Only four people in the world and one of them is declaring war against another. This trend has continued.

The history of Israel and her neighbors is a war history.

The *New York Times* is not everyone's favorite source of factual material, but they did have an article some years back that stated:

"War is defined as an active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives. Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century."

Wikipedia found 12,703 battles which had an exact location and date, from 2500 B.C.

Depending on how you define war, one has estimated that there were anywhere from 10,000 to 250,000 wars on the planet since history was recorded.

Paul told us that in the first century, Isaiah, seven hundred years before Paul, said: mankind does not know the way of peace. Look in your own home. The stupid things we fight over. The divorce rate, even among believers. We love our wars. We'll kill everything around us to be right.

I'm not a pacifist. But I am painfully aware as are you that there is altogether too much war, and the reason is that man without God is at war with himself. He has no peace within, so there's no way he will have peace without.

Now Paul sums it all up with one more quote from David. This time it is Psalm 36:1, where David does some summarizing of his own when he says, "An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes."

**3:18**

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Why is man not righteous? Why does he turn aside? Why has he become unprofitable? Why does obnoxious odor come from his mouth, and poison from his tongue? Why does he murder and destroy and make miserable? Why has he no peace?

*There is no fear of God out in front to guide him.*

We have long been taught that we believers are not to be afraid of God any longer. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, we hear, but no need for it now. There is of course truth in that. But it depends how far along the relationship has gone. I do not read of any age limit where God's discipline of His children is suddenly not a factor. Knowing there could be some discipline – and it's correct to call it punishment – could save a good man from many a problem.

Even in the most loving of father-child relationships, a measure of fear is necessary.

Could it be that in the church of today, one of the problems is that we have picked up a notion of our Father in Heaven that resembles more of a grandfather, a nice old guy who just wants to get along and give you gifts every time you smile pretty? A softie who can't bear to think negative things about His kids?

That's not the Bible notion. Granted that perfect love casts out that original fear, but how perfect is your love of the Father?

Of course, for the unbeliever, any imaginable fear is warranted. Jesus commands him to fear the one that can deal with both body and soul in eternal punishment. Those who refuse the punishment that Jesus took for their sins must bear Divine wrath themselves. Sin has consequences, eternal ones. Fear!

All sin, say Paul and David, stems from the fact that man does not fear God.

Paul's indictments are in, echoed by David, Solomon, Isaiah. God has spoken.

### **3:19**

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those under the law..."

The law. What is your idea of "the law" as mentioned by New Testament writers? Moses? Ten Commandments? Exodus through Deuteronomy? Let's look. Jesus for the most part spoke of the law as that portion of what we call the Old Testament that was written by Moses. When he wanted to go beyond Moses He spoke of the "law and the prophets" as two separate entities. Once however He did refer to one of the Psalms, 82, as the law.

So it was already acceptable in Jesus' day to lump those two ideas together, as in John 12:34, when the people challenged one of Jesus' statements. They said, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever..." Of course Jesus talked often of being lifted up, which meant He was going to die and not fulfill what the law said.

But where is such a statement about Messiah? Micah 4:7 speaks of a day when the Lord will reign in Zion forever. That was their belief, and it was true. But the point here is that Jews spoke of the prophet Micah as being a part of "the law."

Paul uses the word law more than anyone in the New Testament. Over seventy times in the book of Romans itself, and nearly fifty times in the rest of his writings. Generally he speaks of Moses when he brings up the subject. But not always.

1 Corinthians 14 addresses the crisis of women attempting to take men's positions in church. Paul quotes from Genesis but calls Genesis the law. So we see it is the heart of God we are talking about when we speak of law. Not a law that came from Moses, but from God.

And here you will note that Paul has just quoted the Psalms and a prophet in his indictments against sinners, following up with this verse 19, "whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law."

So we must interpret "law" a little more broadly than what happened up on Mt. Sinai. God has always had a desire in His heart for men to conform to Him. That did not change at Sinai, and it didn't change at Calvary.

What happened at Sinai was the written revelation of what God wants. What happened at Calvary was the end of an era, and the beginning of a new way of obeying God, namely God writing His own ways on our hearts. The law lives. The written law died, nailed to the cross, but the will of God, the law, is nailed to our hearts. Don't think for a moment that God



has gone soft on sin or changed His mind about Who He is and what he wants from us. The moral law stands. The ceremonial sacrificial law is already fulfilled in Christ.

And so we say to the Jews, you have just been indicted. The law speaks to you. David speaks to you as well as Moses. Solomon and Isaiah join their voices. Guilty, is the verdict!

But wait. That's not how verse 19 continues.

"... that every mouth may be stopped..."

Oh, every Jewish mouth must be stopped. No, read on...

"... and *all the world* may become guilty before God."

Guilty. Accountable. *Hupodikos*, under justice. Under judgment. Remember Paul's teaching in chapter 2, "When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law... these are a law unto themselves." Where does all true law originate? From God. The law is inside all of us, Jew or Gentile, and we all broke it.

The indictments are in. The witnesses have all spoken. Paul says the verdict is guilty as charged. Thank God the letter does not end there, but one more summation of the case and restatement of the verdict in verse 20:

**3:20**

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight..."

In conclusion, says the prosecuting attorney, based on all the facts I have brought before you regarding human nature, the human conscience, the equality of Jew and Gentile in terms of their breaking of God's commands,

I offer this one final statement. And his words have the authority of Christ Himself, whose apostle he was:

By doing good things, yes, even the good things in your heart and in the book, no flesh will be justified. You can't do in your human nature all that God says you are to do, no matter how hard you try. You'll never approach His holiness in fallen flesh. You can't reach Him on your own. No justification is possible. You cannot be right with God based on keeping the rules.

But why, why? Lost mankind screams to the Heavens. Paul has the answer ready at the very end of the verdict,

"... for by the law is the knowledge of sin..."

Paul brings out elsewhere that the law is good. Holy. Pure. Nothing wrong with the law. And that's the problem. There's something wrong with us. I read the law, I like it. I approve of it. But every time the law tells me to do something good, my human nature has an opposite idea. The more law, the more I want to sin. I'm doomed. Even trying my best to love the law of God I go deeper into the law of human flesh and depravation.

I'll never please God. Never. Always guilty.

I quote directly from MacArthur, pp 178-179:

"No matter how often a man tells himself he is good, he inevitably sees that he cannot help thinking, saying, and doing wrong things and feeling guilty about it. Guilt drives people to alcohol, drugs, despair, insanity and... suicide..."

"men feel guilty because they are guilty... all of the psychological counseling in the world cannot relieve a person of his guilt. At best it can only make him feel better, superficially and temporarily, by placing the

blame on someone else or something else. That... only intensifies the guilt because it adds dishonesty to the sin...

“Man’s guilt has only one cause – his own sin – and unless his sin is removed, his guilt cannot be. That is why the first element of the gospel is confronting men with the reality of their sin... until a person is convicted of his sin, the gospel has nothing to offer...”

“God loves you” won’t do it. Many people take your good intention and agree with it, saying to themselves, if God already loves me, why do I need your Gospel? Or, Yeah, I know He loves me. I love me too. He should love me. I deserve it.

One more item from MacArthur, which he borrowed from Donald Barnhouse’s commentary on Romans:

“Man stands before God today like a little boy who swears with crying and tears that he has not been anywhere near the jam jar, and who with an air of outraged innocence, pleads the justice of his position, in total ignorance of the fact that a good spoonful of the jam has fallen on his shirt under his chin and is plainly visible to all but himself...”

Man is guilty of sin, and feels it, but won’t confess it, and so must die with it unforgiven.

Now take a deep breath. Let the verdict sink in. Are you lost? Are you in despair yet? Yes? Excellent! Then you are ready for verse 21, but not until...

**3:21**

“But now...”

Been to a Bulls game lately? The announcer slowly and boringly wades through the names of the opposing team. So and so, center, so and so, guard....zzzz.

Then what? Lights flash. Excitement in the arena builds. With the sound of a general marching into a city, the suddenly-awakened speaker shouts,

“AND NOW...”

It is the same pent-up emotion I feel is in Paul’s heart as he pens what we call verse 21... Oh, dark dark has been the midnight. The description of sin and guilt and lost humanity is depressing beyond words. BUT NOW...

You Jews and in some way you Gentiles, all depended on the law or your good conscience to save you. I have proved to you that mankind is universally corrupt. BUT NOW....

Your own righteousness? Forget it! You will always fall short. Man cannot be righteous before God on his own. The law is holy but you are not. The law condemns you. BUT NOW...

“the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed...”

What? I can be righteous without the law? There’s justice and goodness and acceptance before God without the law? That sounds like heresy!

How can a man be righteous before a holy God?

Why, that is exactly what Job asked in Job 9:2. The question implies that if the law is set aside in some way, there must be something else I must do.

The people in John the Baptist’s wilderness asked, “What shall we do?”

People around Jesus, the miracle worker, asked, “What can we do to work the works of God?” The rich young ruler asked, “What good thing can I do to inherit eternal life?” Pentecost, ditto, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Even Paul on the Damascus Road, “What shall I do, Lord?” The Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Remember that “righteous” in Romans is not about a series of good things we do. The word can just as easily be translated “justified.” In verse 20 Paul is saying no flesh will be justified by the law. Now he says justice is available without the law.

Men who are always calling out for human justice are hoping for something that does not exist in the world. Injustice or unrighteous behavior is with us permanently and universally. We can only appeal to God’s justice, His sense of right and wrong, His sense of making everything fair and good.

And God accomplished that at Calvary, as we will see. Justice has already been obtained. God did it without Moses. That justice is available and at Paul’s writing had just been revealed to the world. Now people all over the planet have experienced it individually. One day the Just King Himself will return and bring righteousness/justice to the government, to every nation. Isaiah 32:1 declares, “Behold, a king will reign in righteousness.”

But we are way ahead of the story. Paul says it has just been revealed to man. Only twenty to thirty years old is this righteous revelation when Paul speaks.

But had anyone even talked about it before? Paul says, if you had read Moses and the Prophets, you would have known about the coming of this righteousness.

“being witnessed by the law and the Prophets,”

Jesus told the Jews one day, “If you had believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” That’s a challenging statement for any man to make, that the Bible actually says something about me. But Moses did write about Jesus. Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15 that a prophet like himself would one day arise.

Moses unwittingly asked the people of God to kill a lamb and place its blood on the doorposts of their homes. That was about Jesus.

The rock that followed them through the wilderness was Jesus.

The law about a man hanging on a tree and being accursed was about Jesus.

Every piece of furniture in the Tabernacle and Temple pointed to Jesus. The sacrificial law and the feasts and the foods, it was all about Him and the righteousness He would produce.

Job, in the midst of his afflictions, knew that his Redeemer lived and would rescue him.

David wrote entire Psalms about the coming Savior, His suffering, His glory. His resurrection.

Isaiah probably came the closest to preaching the Gospel in his 53rd chapter: "He was wounded for our transgressions." We sinned, He was punished. That's Gospel. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." That's Gospel. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him... You make His soul an offering for sin..." That is good news, and Isaiah preached it seven hundred years before it happened!

Then that 32nd chapter of Isaiah that I already quoted. A king reigns. Princes will rule with justice. Bodies will be whole. Minds will be whole. Ungodliness will be done away.

Truly the law and the prophets witnessed to the Jews of a righteousness that would one day supersede the law and the prophets. The Old Testament had the New Testament hidden away, to be revealed to us and for us in our day.

Now Paul becomes very explicit in his definition of God's righteousness, or justice:

3:22

"even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe."

What does it mean to be right with God? What does it mean for God to be satisfied with us? What does it mean for justice to be served on sin?

That's all one question. There are two true answers, and one false one. The first true one is only theoretical, but impossible: Just keep the law. Be good, perfectly. Do good deeds, constantly.

The world has its take on this answer, a perversion of the true answer that makes it a false answer: Do more good than you did bad. Be a nice person. Be sure your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds on God's judgment scale. Try your best.

The other true answer is before us now, gratefully, thankfully. It is startlingly simple, but was not easy for Jesus to make it possible. It is wonderfully free, but cost the Son of God His life. It is the answer that is still hidden to the masses though it has been with us for centuries. Faith in Jesus Christ.

Believing, trusting in what Jesus did, not what you can do. Remember, "Abraham believed God and God counted it as righteousness," Genesis 15. That's how it works. Faith comes out of you (but even that by God's grace) and righteousness is imputed to you.

Not "believed in God". All the angelic hosts of Satan believe in God. The devil inside the Gadarene demoniac of Mark 5 recognized that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Most High God. In Paul's life, a little slave girl's

demon recognized that the message being preached by Paul was the way of salvation, Acts 16.

No. If mental assent could save, all demons would be on their way to Heaven. We are not trying to get people to believe in God when we go to the street. We are presenting to people the offer of this God to forgive them based on the sacrifice, the blood, of Jesus. If they trust Christ's blood, they are saved.

But we do not want to over-simplify conversion, true salvation. We don't reduce it to a formula or a sinner's prayer, however nicely worded. I quote A. W. Tozer here:

"Something has happened to the doctrine of justification... the faith of Paul and Luther was a revolutionizing thing. It upset the whole life of the individual and made him into another person altogether. It laid hold on the life and brought it unto obedience to Christ. It took up its cross and followed along with Jesus with no intention of going back. It said good-bye to its old friends as certainly as Elijah when he stepped into the fiery chariot and went away in the whirlwind. It had a finality about it. It snapped shut on a man's heart like a trap; it captured the man and made him from that moment a happy love-servant of His Lord." (from *The Root of the Righteous*.)

A seventeenth-century English minister named Joseph Alleine wrote along similar lines: I quote from his book *An Alarm to the Unconverted*.

"All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert; he loves not only the wages, but the work of Christ; not only the benefits, but the burden of Christ; he is willing not only to tread out the corn, but to draw under the yoke; he takes up the command of Christ, yea, the cross of Christ..."

"Jesus is a sweet name, but men love not the Lord Jesus in sincerity. They will not have Him as God offers, to be a Prince and a Savior. They divide what God has joined, the king and the priest..."



That's what saving faith looks like. His yoke is easy, but it is a yoke, for all men serve under some yoke. His burden is light, but it is a burden, for we will either carry the burden of our sin or the burden of His cross. Men need to be told this at the beginning of their walk with Christ, and not have it sprung on them half-way down the road.

And so the righteousness of God is transferred over to any repentant sinner when He truly believes God.

"...for there is no difference..."

What is the apostle saying? What He said before. There is no partiality with God. Whether Jew or Gentile, all sinners are equally unable to please God in their own flesh. And whether Jew or Gentile, anyone who has faith in Christ's work is automatically made righteous. God sees only His Son Jesus when you are in Him. Anyone in the Son is immediately in the Father's good graces.

Then he repeats the entire concept in those next two verses we learned as children:

**3:22**

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

"Fall short" is from *hustereo* which has the idea of being inferior, or behind something else. The glory of God is out in front of us. It's the prize. It calls us forward, but we never can reach it. Luther struggled with this coming behind for years. He tried everything to please God, to please the church. He wanted to be a holy man and the more he tried the worse it got. Holiness, God's glory and majesty and perfection, were always out there tantalizing him. But he never caught up until he got hold of a verse in the book we are studying.

Every honest man admits that he falls short. But what most men don't understand is that falling short is a death sentence. Falling short means there is sin in your life. Sin brings death, eternally.

But those who get hold of faith in Christ will be, as it says in the next verse,

**3:24**

“being justified freely by His grace...”

A ton of treasure in these verses. So much there that we don't want to be in a hurry. You just got a mouthful of meaning and it is important to chew your food a long time before you swallow.

We like to talk about being saved. Paul talked equally about being justified. One cannot be saved or delivered until justification has taken place.

Note that justification and sanctification are not the same, but they cannot be separated. As Father Son and Spirit refer to separate personages of the Godhead but are inseparable, so one cannot be justified without starting that sanctification process at the same time.

Justification makes you right before God in a legal sense. It is as though you had never sinned. Everything is forgiven. The declaration is made that [enter your name here] is righteous.

You say, I never heard such a statement being made when I first came to Christ. No, it is unlikely you heard it, because it was said on a Judean hillside by an act of the Son of God on a Roman cross.

When Jesus died that day, He paid the penalty for your sin, believer. I say your sin, because the unbeliever is not included in that sacrifice. God is just. He would never make someone pay twice for his sins. The unbeliever will be paying for his sinfulness in a lake of fire. Your sins were paid for on Calvary.

You say, that's not fair! If you are beginning to see that, you are beginning to understand grace. Why me? If you are asking that, you are asking the right question, but don't expect an answer any time soon! There is no human answer to the question.

We call this unmerited favor, this undeserved blessing, grace. You were made just, made righteous, the very righteousness of God Almighty, by an act of grace.

Freely. The word *dorean* in the Greek does not mean many of the ways we use the word in English. We talk of spending freely, a gate swinging freely or without hindrance, or freely translating a verse, that is, not according to the normal rules. No, the word here means "gratuitously."

You say, that doesn't help much! Okay, it means unearned. It means a gift. It means no cost. No way you can repay or earn.

I stand before you having been made right with God before I ever did anything good. I am in right relationship with Heaven not by anything I could pay or earn. I have no claim of my own to God's righteousness, but I have every claim there is to it anyway because God decided, for His own purposes, to declare it so, and He made it possible

"through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Another word has been added. Every word is important when the Spirit of God takes the trouble to put words on paper via an inspired apostle or prophet. Look at every word.

*Apolutrosis*. Redemption. Ransom. Payment.

We lump together being saved, being justified, being sanctified, being redeemed, as though they were all the same thing, some nice experience we had many years back. Experience is good, and Paul had some of his

own, and we will too. But we must learn to appreciate the full bag of gifts laid on us at the cross.

Ransomed! Sold out to the devil, but bought back by Jesus. You could not pay the price that was being required of you. No way! How much does it cost for you to sin against God? Here, Lord, let me offer you some money for that sin?

In Rome, such talk is commonplace. Want a soul out of purgatory a little sooner? They are there for their sins, right? Well, buy an indulgence. Give the priest an offering and he will pray officially for you in the next mass.

You say, they don't teach it like that. No but the people hear it like that. I'll give some money to the priest, he'll pray, and my dear departed aunt Susie will spend a few days less in torment.

Think you can buy off God? Do you remember what happened to Simon the magician of Acts 8, when he offered money for the Holy Spirit?

Remember what happened to the Jews when they offered their dead works and rituals and sacrifices to God without heart?

How about you? Have you been offering things to God hoping that would save you, make you right with Him? There is no way you can ever be more right with God than you are by virtue of the facts of Calvary. When you accept that sacrifice as your own, you realize the price has already been paid. From that moment nothing you can do at church or at home or in your prayer closet will ever make you more righteous in His sight. He sees you through the blood of His Son.

Ransomed. Redeemed.

You know how ransoms work. One morning, in the mailbox, a parent receives a note from a kidnapper. Their child is away at college, but he has just been abducted. He will be returned only after an exorbitant price has

been paid to the kidnapers. The parents panic and call friends and relatives and desperately try to raise money. But they can't. It's just too much. They try to negotiate, but the abductors are firm. This amount, or you will never see your son again. Sometimes the story ends there.

In other cases, a hero emerges. Someone with deep pockets steps forward, gives the parents the money to pay the ransom. The son is restored. Through effective investigation and with time, the kidnapper is caught and brought to justice and everyone lives happily ever after. Even the money is returned.

That's your story. One morning you get the message somewhere deep inside of you that you just can't keep resisting temptation. You give in. You start sinning. And you sin more and more. You aren't happy with yourself. You want out. You receive messages from the whole round of false teachers. Rome says you can make it if you join them and are willing to spend eons in Purgatory. Other religions come along and tell you to just keep trying to be good. God is just. He knows that if you try your best, you've got just as much chance as anyone.

You try it all. Nothing relieves you from the original lostness, the original bondage. Then one day, you are told of a hero that already emerged many years ago and paid the price for your bondage. If you will put your hand in His and believe the Redeemer, you will find peace and freedom and deliverance. The debt has already been paid.

So you do that. And let me tell you, the abductor of your soul has already been discovered, tried, and found guilty of crimes against all humanity. His punishment is just and sure. And you will live happily ever after. Everything that was stolen from you will be returned a thousand-fold and then some.

In other words, you've been redeemed. Bought back with a price unimaginable, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You know the song,

He paid a debt He did not owe,  
I owed a debt I could not pay ,  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.  
And now I sing a brand new song,  
Amazing Grace,  
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

My debt He paid upon the cross,  
He cleansed my soul from all its dross,  
I thought that no one could all my sins erase.  
But now I sing a brand new song,  
Amazing Grace,  
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

O such great pain my Lord endured,  
When He my sinful soul secured,  
I should have died there but Jesus took my place.  
So now I sing a brand new song,  
Amazing Grace,  
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

He didn't give to me a loan,  
He gave Himself now He's my own,  
He's gone to Heaven to make for me a place.  
And now I sing a brand new song,  
Amazing Grace [the whole day long],  
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

Justified, made right with God. Redeemed, bought back with a price, the very blood of God. Great words. But there's more. *Propitiation* is next.

**3:25**

“whom God set forth as a propitiation [through faith in] His blood...”

The “whom” is still Jesus. We are in the middle of a long Paul-type sentence that stretches from verses 21 to 26. You might want to read those verses again before you move on here.

“Set forth” comes from a word that means “to place before,” or exhibit, or display, or even purpose or plan, as in Romans 1:13, “Often I purposed to come to you.”

This plan that began in God’s secret purposes was manifest publicly. You can believe or disbelieve what happened at Calvary, but you can’t ignore it. This is not theory, this is historical fact. Those who try to claim that it wasn’t really Jesus on that cross, make fools of themselves, as history cries out against them. Whether in the Bible or out, this thing that Jesus did is proclaimed as a part of the historical documents of our planet. God made a public display, exhibit “A”, if you please.

What was God displaying?

He was displaying a propitiation. That word means, something that gains someone’s favor. Something that appeases. In the case of the human race, we needed someone to gain God’s favor for us. Someone to appease God’s wrath. He was mad at us! He is angry with the sinner every day, says my Bible. Only what Jesus did turns away His anger. You can say you’re sorry, but the damage has been done. God has to have a reason to forgive you, and that reason is Jesus, the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice that was displayed at Calvary.

This word *hilasterion* translated “propitiation” appears again in Hebrews 9, where the writer is talking about the tabernacle and its furniture. Let me read beginning in verse 4:

“... the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the

tablets of the covenant [the ten commandments]; and above it [the ark] were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat [*hilasterion*]...”

Picture a golden chest, a box, roughly 4 by 2 by 2. Inside the box a pot, a rod, two tablets. Now look at the lid, the covering, of that box. Two golden angels facing one another, pointing to the center. And there, says God in Exodus 25:22, “I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.”

A cloud would appear at this special Lid. God Himself would be in the cloud. He would rest there, dwell there. Later Jews and now Christians came to refer to this resting residence of God on the mercy seat as the Shekinah, literally the residence.

Many today want to experience that same Presence of God for themselves. Well and good, let’s always seek His Presence. But the mercy seat appearances were not just for experience. They were for conversation. Communication. I will talk with you about everything I will give you in commandment, says God.

See the big picture. Mercy covering Law. God’s Voice covering His written words. The promise came later that God would write those very words on our heart. You who know Christ have heard His very voice speaking to your heart. You have learned to love Him and obey Him.

But all of this possible because of the act that that seat foreshadowed. The writer of Hebrews and the apostle Paul both use the same word. One time it is referring to Tabernacle furniture. The other time it is referring to something that Jesus did to fulfill the picture of that lid. Same word. Same heart of God. To show mercy to men who cannot keep the Law inside that box. Oh the law is a part of the picture. The law is eternal, God does not change His mind. But mercy has triumphed over law and saved us from our carnal disobedience to it.



Through faith in His blood. [NKJV has “by” his blood, through faith, awkward and not called for in the Greek.] I know that Catholics believe they contact the blood when they have communion. And I know of a Protestant group that believes they contact the blood of Jesus that went into the ground when they are baptized in water, which also comes up out of the ground. And there are others who imagine the substance of blood available to them to use as a magic wand over all ailments.

I believe the blood is effective not because we can touch it physically today, but because it was shed. Period. The sacrifice was made. Jesus cried out “It is finished,” and He meant it. The sacrifice was offered, atonement was made, God was appeased, satisfied, and we look to a historic fact, not a magical rite or wand, for our salvation.

So we have faith in his blood. We believe that the shed blood of Jesus saves us. Colossians 1:20 says God made peace and reconciliation through Jesus’ blood. Romans 5:9, we are justified by His blood. Ephesians 1:7, we have redemption through His blood. Ephesians 2:13, we are made near by the blood of Christ. 1 Peter 1:19, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Revelation 1:5, Jesus loosed us, or washed us, from our sins in His own blood. Revelation 12:11, God’s people in the Tribulation overcame the enemy by the blood of the Lamb.

What can wash away my sins? Nothing! But the blood of Jesus.  
What can make me whole again? Nothing! But the blood of Jesus.  
For my pardon, this I see. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
For my cleansing this my plea, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus,  
Naught of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus,  
This is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh precious is the flow that makes me white as snow,  
No other found I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus!

“... to demonstrate His righteousness...”

This brings us back to verse 21, that a righteousness separate from the law of Moses has been revealed in Christ, and the first part of this verse, where God “set forth” or “displayed” this mercy seat, this atonement. Made it public. Nothing hidden here!

This same apostle, when speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus with the Edomite king of the line of the Herods, Agrippa, Acts 26, he says clearly that these events were well known by Agrippa because they were not done “in a corner.”

Every other time the word “corner” appears in the New Testament, it is talking about the foundation of a house. Jesus was made the head of the corner. Foundations, and all corners, for that matter, are secret places, hidden. Go stand in the corner, the old teachers use to say. We don’t want to see you.

Jesus’ shedding of His blood was not done in a corner. He didn’t go to a secret room and stick a knife in Himself. He endured a public trial, a public condemnation, a public beating, a public walk up a well-traveled hill, a public crucifixion.

God “demonstrated” it. The word occurs again in the next verse. It is “declare” in the KJV. A public statement. You can say something by words, or you can say it by actions. We have the words of Christ for sure, but we also have a public action of God Himself.

For it was God Who “put Him to grief.” It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, Isaiah 53:10.

And in putting His own Son on a cross, God was saying, "This is My righteousness. This is the way to favor with Me. I totally approve of this sacrifice. As far as I am concerned, and I am the only one who needs to be concerned, it is finished. All sins are now forgiven to the person who accepts this sacrifice. This One has fulfilled the law in every respect. This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him. See what He is saying to you. I wrote my laws in a book and you broke those laws. Now through this sacrifice I see only the laws written on your heart, when Jesus is in that heart."

"... because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed."

So important to see the Greek text here. Not sure how the KJV people came up with what they came up with, but here is a case where the NKJV makes more textual sense. Notice I said "textual". We care not for "common sense" or "I don't understand that" or "that does not compute." What we must care about is what did the Spirit say to Paul. Here is the order of the Greek text from the Greek out of which the KJV was translated:

"in respect of the passing by of the having-taken-place sins in the forbearance of God."

We're talking about a group of sins that have been passed by. That KJV word "remission" is not a translation of the Greek word *paresis*. Rather it was the relaxing, the passing by, the passing over, the ignoring of a group of sins, temporarily. No sin is ignored permanently. But there was a collection of sins that were ignored for a season, due to the forbearance of God.

So what is forbearance? Back to the Greek. The word here means "self-restraint" or "tolerance".

God is tolerating sin? God is restraining Himself, and letting things pass?  
God is overlooking sin? Where in the world do you get a doctrine like that? Glad you asked. It is from this same apostle in Acts 17.

Paul is at Mars Hill, talking to the philosophers of Athens. Just before Paul is graciously – or otherwise – escorted from the stage he makes a startling declaration. He has been talking about how men worshiped so many different things ignorantly. As in Romans, he is cataloguing the sins of mankind, and then he says (verse 30) “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked (KJV, “winked at”).

“But now he commands all men everywhere to repent!” Why?

“Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.”

The implication being... that judgment is imminent. Yes, it has been hanging over the human race since Jesus died. The Jews have already begun to taste of the judgment of God. One day we will all stand before the Judge of all the earth, unless we acknowledge Jesus as Savior.

This Acts message is a preview of the Romans message. It was spoken just several years before this letter was written. The message is consistent:

- All men are sinners.
- God has not judged sin yet, though it may seem so at times. Look at all the sinners even in our own day that “get away with” sin.
- God has overlooked, passed over, sins because He is going to demonstrate His justice at a particular time by pouring out wrath on His Son
- That particular time has come and gone. God has made a public display of Jesus before the world.
- That Son will be the one by whom he will eventually judge the world.

- Meanwhile, since that awful day at Calvary, all men can be forgiven of the judgment they deserve, and that is surely coming.

### 3:26

“to demonstrate [I say, KJV] at the present time His righteousness...”

The KJV adds “I say” to let you know that Paul has already said something about demonstrating his righteousness in the previous verse, which is actually a part of one long sentence that started in verse 21! Paul is repeating himself because he interjected an explanation of that demonstration, the passing over of sins.

The thought goes, “God has displayed Jesus on a cross now, at this particular time in history to culminate His justice on mankind. Many have sinned, but God has waited until now to judge that sin for all time. That judgment was on His Son.” It’s Isaiah 53 again: He was wounded for our transgressions. We sinned. He was punished. And God said, “That’s good.” It pleased the Lord to bruise Him. God was satisfied with that arrangement.

Now if people aren’t interested in this deal, they can ignore the sacrifice and try to pay up on their own. But that will literally take forever. As long as God lives, sin cannot be wiped out by any other method than the blood. Refuse the blood of Jesus, and you suffer on your own.

That’s how God sees justice. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” Most of us understand the “faithful” part, maybe we never considered the “just” part. Justice now demands, and I say it reverently not with an attitude, *demands* that upon our confession, we are forgiven. Because of us? No, because of the blood that was shed. He won’t punish us again. The punishment was laid on Jesus. That satisfied the bill. Paid in full.

Suppose you buy a house. On credit of course. A mortgage. But some millionaire comes along and pays off the house. So the next month you send in your mortgage payment as usual and it is rejected. It would be unjust of the mortgage folks to take your money. The debt has been paid.

He is faithful and just to forgive us. It is required by His own laws!

“...that He might be just and the justifier...”

God needed a way to justify you while remaining holy and just Himself. I quote MacArthur here: (p. 219 of his commentary, Volume 1)

“The real ‘problem’, as it were, with salvation was not the matter of getting sinful men to a holy God but of getting a holy God to accept sinful men without violating His justice.”

God made rules. We all disobeyed them. Can God just say, no problem, just try a little harder? No. We all deserved death. But kill them all? Then what purpose, creation? No, He wanted to save people. He decided to have only one Man, a perfect one, be a sacrifice for everyone. Sacrificial salvation. Substitutionary salvation. One dies, all others forgiven.

That’s what the whole Jewish system of sacrifice is about. God was teaching the Jews and all of us how very much someone’s blood needs to be shed so that we can live. Animals were only picture of what that supreme sacrifice would one day do. We learn later that in fact animal sacrifice can never take away sin.

That’s where the forbearance of God kicks in. He demanded the sacrifices, but not one sin was ever forgiven in that method. They were rolled back until Calvary, and Calvary covered it all. That’s what the display of the cross is about. God found a way to justify all of us who are interested, and remain just Himself.

The legendary King Arthur had a problem like this. He and his lovely queen Guenevere allegedly ruled England somewhere back in Britain's murky past. How Arthur loved this beautiful woman. But one day it was discovered that the Queen had another love interest. The King was crushed. She was guilty of high treason, not just adultery. It was an assault on the Kingdom, a betrayal of the first order.

But what could he do? He loved this woman. But he loved justice. He was establishing a rule of law in his kingdom with which no one could be allowed to interfere. Love or justice, which would it be?

The answer. He would step aside, as Sir Lancelot, the lover and the leader of an uprising, would sweep into the palace grounds and rescue the Queen, taking her to a convent to live out the rest of her days.

Not a perfect picture of the grace of God but there are some parallels. Our King had a problem. He loved us. But we committed high treason against heaven. How can he save us from His own holy laws? The one we love, Jesus, not an antagonist of the Father, but One sent by the Father's plan, swept into the Kingdom of Moses and the law, put us on the back of His horse and rescued us from death. And the Father was happy about it. Mercy and truth had won. Grace and law had won. Mercy and justice had won.

"...of the one who has faith in Jesus..."

Let's not skip over this detail. The salvation that Jesus bought is not for everyone. Hear me well. God did not suddenly say to the whole world, "You're all free. I forgive you. Go on your way rejoicing."

This awful doctrine is called universalism. This is the notion that regardless of the evils men have committed or continue to commit, when it's all said and done, God's heart is so big He will just forgive everyone whether they ask forgiveness or not.

Can you imagine the trampling down of Heaven's beauty and glory by unchanged un-repentant foul-mouthed loose-living earthlings? The unholy suddenly made partakers of God's Holy places without once ever giving a nod to Jesus Christ?

God is seen by these folks as the great Psychologist in the Sky, who looks at each poor human and says, "I understand. You had it rough. You were poor. You were rich. You were not parented well. You got some bad teaching. You were abused. You were hurt. You lived in the wrong part of the city or the nation or the world. I understand. You are excused, come on in."

That's partly true. All of it is partly true. God will come down to our level and forgive everything in our past, if and only if we place our confidence in what Jesus did on the cross. Paul spells it out better in chapter 10 of this letter. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is the Lord Jesus in whom they must be made to believe. This is a faith that will come by hearing from the preached Word of God. He is very specific. No Gospel, no salvation and no entrance into Heaven.

God will justify anyone. But finish that sentence, "...who has faith in Jesus."

We're not talking here about intellectual belief in a Man called Jesus who lived long ago. We're talking about a supernatural faith that invades your soul and tells you, as you hear God's Word about the crucifixion, the resurrection, the promise of the Spirit, eternal life, it's all true. You just know it's true. No one has to convince you or pound it into you. You're reading or hearing , and you just know.

Please include the reading part. Or the hearing part. No one is saved by a dream or a vision or a personal thought. No one is saved without the Word that comes from Spirit-filled apostles. All the false religions have begun by a notion inside the head or from a demon spirit or a fallen angel or a dream or a vision.



The truth must come from the Word.

But it comes. And it's real. And your accepting of God's Truth is one of the ways you can know you have been born again. One moment you did not believe. You did not care. The Spirit comes, and with the heart you believe and you start doing the things God said you should do. You confess this faith to others around you. Life is new.

And the true believer knows that what Paul is about to say is so true...

### **3:27**

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded."

Why does Paul bring this up to begin with? Why suddenly talk about boasting? You have to go back to verse 1. He asks, "What advantage does the Jew have?" And the ordinary Jew will answer, "I've been circumcised," or "I have the law," or "My people were called directly by God," or "God spoke to our fathers, God Himself made us special."

But Paul, though he would agree that all these things happened, asks another question in verse 9: "Are we Jews better than the Gentiles?" Astonishingly – to the Jewish mind – Paul says, No. We're all included under sin.

No one has bragging rights! I'm not better than you. You're not better than me. I have no right to brag about my accomplishments, my history. Neither do you.

The world used to love to say, "I'm OK, you're OK." Paul says, "I'm not OK. And you're not OK either." Nobody gets to boast.

"By what law? Of works?..."

I say no one gets to boast, and you Romans might ask me, Show me your logic. What principle are you acting upon here? What's your basis for believing that people cannot boast?

There are only two bases upon which man can stand before God justified. Only two types of religion in the world. One is based on what I do, the other is based on believing in what He did, and does.

Let's look at option number one: works. What I do. Can we exclude the possibility of boasting, taking personal credit for our salvation, by the whole works idea? Paul says no. It is works that is the very thing that makes people boast.

Look what I did, they say. I was good enough to choose Jesus for myself. I started going to church. I started giving my money. I started singing in the choir. I got a haircut and a shave. I started wearing the right kind of clothes. I got elected to the board. I give to charity. I fast twice in the week. And every time these people tell you something they did, they are expecting you to say, in some way, why you dear person! Aren't you special!

Worse, they are expecting God to do the same. Look what I did! I picked myself up and reformed my whole personality. Sure, God helped, 'cause God helps those who help themselves. Sure God gets credit, but so do I.

The Jew of course would point to his circumcision, his heritage, his history, as we pointed out before.

Obviously works is not the way to exclude boasting and pride. The more you do to earn your salvation, the more you boast about it, and God does not receive the glory. And by the way, you are lost.

There's another religion. Another way. Paul calls it the law of faith. A principle, a rule, that if followed, eliminates all pride all boasting.

Faith. Faith that what God did at Calvary is enough. Faith that the price Jesus paid for your sins was the right price. Faith that when Jesus said it was finished, He meant it. Faith that the law that accused us was nailed to the cross when He was. Faith that the sacrifice for evil was offered and accepted. No faith in my ability to save myself. No faith in my fleshly attempts to please God. No faith in the world system of justice. No faith in Satan's empty promises of power, things, satisfaction.

Made just, made whole, made right with God, by simply believing God. Not in God, but God. Believing that what He said He'd do, He did and is doing.

There is such a people in the world. They are mixed into most of the church's congregations, alongside the works people. There are people doing similar works as their fellows, some because they are saved and love the service of Jesus, some in a desperate attempt to prove to God that they are worthy of His approval and salvation. Two men give the same ten-dollar bill, one from love, one from guilt.

Two women give the same sacrificial service, one hoping to advance the Kingdom of the Jesus they appreciate so much, one hoping that Heaven and Earth are watching, and that they will be rewarded with some well-deserved attention.

For sure, no "faith" people can be heard in the church boasting about what they did and who they are. Most of them are tight-lipped about their own achievements and striving to bless others.

Many of the clashes in a congregation are not between skin colors or culture types or even political differences, but between works people and faith people. Securely saved people, and wannabe saved people trying to work their way to the pearly gates.

So what is saving faith? What does it look like in real life? First, I follow MacArthur (not directly quote him) in giving you a list of things it is not:

It is not visible morality. Recall the rich young ruler Jesus encountered. He had kept all the commandments, at least he thought he had. But his heart was not right. He was all about himself.

It is not just a bunch of Biblical head-knowledge. The scribes and Pharisees had that. "You search the Scriptures... but you won't come to Me," Jesus said to them. They had memorized Torah from a child. Not saved.

It is not religious involvement. Keeping all the rules of Christianity. You are in church, you read, you pray.

Being in the ministry is not saving faith. Judas was treasurer of the first Jesus ministry on earth. Many false teachers and false prophets came on the scene early on, busily converting people to themselves.

Conviction of sin is not being saved. Mental institutions are filled with guilty people.

Assurance of salvation is not your ticket. Many are basing their salvation on the wrong thing and are assured they are saved. Signed a card. Joined a church. Got baptized. Made a decision. Went forward in the meeting. Shook a pastor's hand. Said the sinner's prayer, whatever that is. Sincerity, confidence in your position is not enough.

It is not a no-doubt experience. Think of all the people who had experiences that were not God. Joseph Smith and Muhammad come to mind.

Please understand, any one of these things, and all of them, are good things and probably will happen to you. But none of them is proof you are saved. How can you know?

Once more, MacArthur has a list. I am paraphrasing his words, actually turning the list into a series of self-test questions. Please note, this is not a

how-to-be-saved list. This is a list of fruits of salvation, so you can perhaps let yourself know whether you truly are in the faith.

- Do you really love God?
- Do you delight in His Word?
- Do you rejoice in spending time with Him?
- Is His glory your aim in life?
- Do you really hate sin?
- Have you truly repented from it, and do you do so regularly?
- Does sin bother you?
- Do you pray regularly, often, and with passion?
- Do you have selfless love for others?
- Are you separated from the world?
- Are you walking in obedience?

For new believers, you will see all these things, but as a budding springtime tree. If you've been in this for a while, you should see a much greener and fuller tree. If I just described a series of things that are totally foreign to your experience, may I suggest that there are probably people in your church who are willing to pray with you for your salvation. (If not, a search for another church is in order!)

Saving faith produces good works. But back to the main path and the point of this argument at present: works, before you are born again, are fruitless, if salvation and being right with God is your goal.

### **3:28**

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

There have actually been several conclusions Paul has come to, several truths he wants his readers to know.

Chapter 1 states the original premise: The Gospel is the power of God to save Jews and Gentiles. Chapter 1 also demonstrates the clear need of that Gospel since all men are sinful.

Chapter 2 concludes that we must never judge anyone because all are guilty. Chapter 2 also concludes that God will judge all men, whether or not they have the law of Moses. Chapter 2 concludes that true Jewishness means an inward cleansing by the Spirit of God.

Chapter 3 concludes that righteousness before God means something outside the law.

And here Paul summarizes his conclusions. There will be no right standing for any man or woman or child except by faith in Jesus Christ. The law will justify no one.

Then he adds a final argument, as though he needed one, to bolster his conclusion:

**3:29**

“Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,”

This question seems oddly placed, but it goes back to a series of questions Paul has been asking:

3:1, “What advantage does the Jew have?” Answer, the Word of God.

3:3. “What if some did not believe?” Answer, it doesn’t matter. The Word is the Word, and Israel disobeyed it.

3:9. “Are we Jews better than the Gentiles?” Not at all. All have sinned.

3:27. “Who has a right to boast?” No one.

3:29. “Is He the God of the Jews only?” The Jews have an advantage, but they are no better than Gentiles, and have no right to boast any more than Gentiles do. Because of their unique calling they began to think that

they were the only ones God loved. Jonah resisted his call because he didn't want God to have mercy on a Gentile nation. Even Peter, under the new dispensation of grace, had to be convinced dramatically that it was okay to visit a Gentile house and proclaim God's forgiveness to it! So Jews do not have an exclusive right to God.

Our God is the God – though not the Father – of all men. All will stand before Him as responsible and accountable. He is in fact the only God. Paul says elsewhere that there are many “so-called gods whether in heaven or earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords. Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

One God, in spite of the Kenneth Copelands – and others – of our day who want to teach us that really, we are little gods too. Their blasphemies will one day be revealed for what they are.

One and only one God, and one and only one way of salvation, as in the next verse:

**3:30**

“since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

All men are equally condemned. We learned that through nearly three chapters of this difficult portion of Romans. But all men are equally offered salvation, and have been offered that salvation for many centuries. The message of salvation got buried and perverted and twisted, but those who called upon the name of the Lord, from as early as Genesis 4, had some measure of that message revealed to them.

Let's look at some Greek in this text. Not to be erudite but to see what Paul was saying. The KJV has “seeing” at the beginning of this verse. The NKJV has “since.” The word is *epei*. The “epi” part does indeed mean

“since” but the “per” is an emphasis word, that means “much” or “indeed.”

Yes! says Paul. He is the God of the Gentiles for sure, since indeed there is only one God. It’s a wake-up call to the Jew who believes that somehow there is a God of the Jews and maybe another god for everyone else! Our God is indeed the God of the Gentiles since indeed He has found a way to justify everyone who is willing.

How so? Faith. Faith covers it all. But not so fast. More Greek to deal with here. Why doesn’t any translation say that God will justify circumcised and uncircumcised by faith, or circumcised and uncircumcised through faith. Why are two different prepositions used in the Greek, *ek* and *dia* , when talking about the Jew and the Gentile?

*Ek* signifies origin. The Jews are to be saved out of (one of the main translations of *ek*) that faith which was given to them first. Paul will show soon that faith actually came before the law, if they could have seen it. It is that original faith by which they will be saved. The faith that was already there in their origins.

*Dia*, through, has to do with the channel of an act. The reason for the act. This faith was already out there, and the Gentile will be saved by jumping into that same channel that was originally opened for the Jew. Only a slight difference, but one more small indication that it’s the Jew first, and also the Greek.

Bottom line. Anyone who is to be saved is to be saved by faith.

So, the law is worthless and to be ignored, right?

**3:31**

“Do we then make void the law through faith?”



What is Paul asking here? This word “void”, what does it mean? In English, one of several meanings is “of no legal force or effect,” as in a contract, or “vain, useless.” I think that best sums up the Greek word here, *katargeho*. It’s translated elsewhere “abolish”, “cease,” “do away,” “make of no effect,” “put away”.

Paul has been telling these Roman Jews that the law will not save them. He’s let them know that faith does save, by contrast. Faith saves, law doesn’t save, so let’s “void” the law, do away with it. It’s vain. It’s useless. It has no effect. Destroy it! Abolish it! Yes?

Paul says no! And he says it in the same way he says it in verses 4 and 6, though not as the King James has it, “God forbid.” That’s close to using God’s name in vain, and the Greek text will have none of it. That’s why the NKJV says simply “Certainly not!” with an exclamation point. But that’s not the Greek either. Better to say just what the Greek says in all three places: “Let it not be!” We might say, “Perish the thought!” Or “Don’t even think such a thing!” That idea does not exist and never should and never will! That’s the force of the Greek word.

What! Get rid of the law? Unthinkable! No,

“...on the contrary, we establish the law.”

We “stand it up”. We don’t tear it down. But wait. That same word is used in Hebrews, where the writer says that God takes away the first (covenant, Moses’) that He may establish the second (the New Covenant under Jesus).

Paul here wants to establish the first, not to tear it down. Listen carefully:

The law was never meant to save us or anyone. Faith in the Gospel was always the plan. The law came for other reasons, that we will get into. And it did what it was supposed to do. So we glory in the law for what it

did. We don't trash it. It was a huge success. Let's not destroy it, abolish it, say it was of no effect.

But it cannot save us. Ever. Anyone. Faith does that, and that faith goes all the way back several thousand years to a man living in old Babylonia among the pagans there. He found something long before Moses came along that we need to look at very carefully!

#### **4:1**

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?”

Let's look at this verse, as all the others, one word at a time. “Then” is “therefore” in this text. Based on all Paul has told us about sin, righteousness, judgment – by the way, the three things Jesus said the Holy Spirit would major in when He came – based on all these things, what shall we do with Abraham? How does Abraham fit into the picture? What did he discover 4,000 years ago? What has he already found that we need to know?

Abraham lived before the law. Six hundred years before. He knew nothing of all the rules and regulations, though he did understand sacrifice, as it had been around since Adam. He didn't know fully of a Savior that would come, of Calvary, of resurrection, of so many theological points that we deem necessary. A very simple man in the things of God, however educated and trained he might have been in the ways of the world.

So this man lived so long ago, so removed from Moses, that he becomes a perfect example of salvation by faith alone apart from the works of the law (3:28).

He found something that Paul believes is necessary for us to find, and for the Jews of his day to find. You see, they had other ideas about Abraham, and Paul has to set them straight.

Before we go into that, we need to look at two different wordings of this first verse. Not overly important but once again symptomatic of the surface problem of textual criticism.

In short, there are different Greek texts from which the New Testament comes. Two of the major ones that our English translations come from are the 19th century Westcott-Hort or Nestle-Aland, and the "Received Text" that goes back to the 1500's and Erasmus. Both of these of course depend on Greek manuscripts of much earlier dates. The manuscripts each of them depended on gives us the variations in the text.

Nothing in these variations is serious. The truth God wants us to have is clear in both manuscripts. Conservative Christians tend toward the Received Text which gave us the KJV.

As I put these two texts together, the Nestle-Aland and Textus Receptus, I get two different readings of Romans 4:1.

Here is the Nestle-Aland, which gives rise to the more modern translations: I am translating the English words as they appear in the text. "What therefore shall we say has found Abraham the father of us according to flesh?"

And in the Textus Receptus from which comes the KJV: "What therefore shall we say Abraham the father of us has found according to flesh?"

Do you see the difference? Is Paul saying simply that Abraham is the physical ancestor of the Jews and that he found something? Or that Abraham has discovered a principle about reliance on human works for salvation? The KJV favors the latter.

I notice that MacArthur straddles the fence here and says it could mean either.

Other researchers lean toward the evidence from the greater number of manuscripts that show Paul is simply saying that Abraham is their natural ancestor. This man that we claim this physical connection to, what did he find? What does he add to the argument I have brought forth?

What argument? That no man can be justified by the law. That salvation is by faith, and not by works. Does Abraham say or do anything about this? You trust this man, your “father” as it were. You hold him up, as well you should. A friend of God. Father of the faithful. A good man. A holy man. We must know: was he saved by faith or by works?

You who know your Bibles will be thinking, if I don’t mention it aloud, about the book of James. James declares that Abraham was justified by works. Paul, justified by faith. Conflict.

Not really. James is talking about justification before men. Proof before men that a man is saved. That is the place of works. Faith without works is dead faith and not saving faith.

This is not at all what Paul is discussing. Paul is talking about the entrance into justification and salvation. How do you get in the door? Being good? Trying hard? No.

No, because

**4:2**

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

A man who does good deeds can cry all day long that he is doing more than most Christians, but that boast, that complaint, will not open Heaven’s doors to him! I mean, can you imagine it. You get to Heaven, and instead of falling at His feet in worship and praise you start out with, Hey God, I made it! I did it! I’ll bet you’re glad I worked so hard so I could

get here. Is that how you envision your entry into the Presence of God one day? Wow, I worked so hard, I deserve to be here. Where's all the rewards I piled up? I mean it wasn't easy trying to be a Christian while people were hating me. All those family responsibilities and then I got sick. But I knew I was racking up points with you and now I deserve a long rest and a mansion, and... where is it?

I don't think so.

How many commercials have you seen lately that tell you to go ahead and buy our wonderful product because you deserve it? We deserve eternal punishment because we have offended an eternal God. No, we get there by grace through faith or we don't get there at all.

But wait: As I said earlier, the Jewish leaders, and with some good reason, believed that Abraham was an example of salvation by works. He was a righteous man. A good man. The most righteous of his day. Look at Genesis 26 and God's words to Abraham's son Isaac:

"I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven... in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." Why? Read on, "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

You and Abraham are going to be blessed because of Abraham's obedience. Works. Statements demanding Abraham's approval by works are in Jewish apocryphal books, Ecclesiasticus, The Prayer of Manasseh, The Book of Jubilees.

So here comes Paul saying, no, it wasn't by works at all. It all started by faith. Abraham did many works, but it was not those works that justified Him in Heaven. Paul has a secret here that they had not seen before, but that Abraham himself found: you can't do God's works unless God has given you God's faith through grace. This is a new revelation to most, and frankly I would not have seen it if Paul through the Spirit had not brought

it out. You who are looking every day at your favorite TV preacher for some new revelation, need to just get your noses back in the Bible and let God speak to you, wonderful truth after wonderful truth.

Yes, Isaac, God is going to bless you because of Daddy's works but those works came because of something else, that came first, God's grace upon his soul. Paul's proof?

Genesis 15:6. Note here as in so many places in the New Testament that these Jewish men appealed to their Scriptures for the truth they needed to prove. The Spirit wrote the Old Testament words just as surely as He is inspiring these apostles, and to get it all today, all we need to do is read the Book and pray. Showing up at a good Bible church every time the doors are open will be helpful too!

#### **4:3**

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'"

Here Paul introduces the grand doctrine of imputation. Receiving something into your system that is not really yours but becomes yours. He'll develop this theme. First, a little of the background of the Genesis quote and the man Abraham.

The city of Ur, in Chaldea was a center of pagan idolatry that in Abraham's time, 2000 years before Jesus, boasted about 300,000 people. It was on the Euphrates, like being on the Mississippi here. It was also a little more than a hundred miles from the Persian Gulf, like the Gulf of Mexico. Lots of commerce. Lots of education. And yes, they could read and write in Abraham's day.

Their religion was the moon god. Joshua 24:2 tells us that his father Terah was an idolater. This was all Abraham knew until that day when God called him. He is one of several men in the Bible that just seem to show up

out of nowhere. Elijah is another one. Melchizedek another. He was a chosen vessel.

Why Abraham? Why you? Why me? The great unanswerable question surfaces again. But Abraham was a good man, you say.

Is idolatry a good thing? He no doubt followed his father for a while, being very religious but very lost as all pagans will be one day. Why Abraham?

We don't know. And as Abraham begins his pilgrimage out of Ur on his way to Canaan, we wonder more and more about God's choice. Fifteen years of waiting in Haran before moving on to Canaan? Running to Egypt during the famine? Trying to pass his wife off as his sister? Oh, she was half-sister, but it was a clearly dishonest decision to conceal their marriage. It was fear. And committing adultery with the servant girl Hagar, to help God keep his promise? It was Sarah's idea, but just as in Eden, the man did not have to listen to the woman. He still does not have to. But if he does, he is to be blamed as much as is she.

A very imperfect man. Like all of God's people. But called. Chosen. Forgiven. Justified. Made righteous. That will be Paul's point. Here is the perfect example in the Old Testament of what it means to be saved by grace through faith.

Galatians 3:6-7, also from Paul: "Therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." Abraham is the "father of all who believe," Romans 4:11 will soon teach us.

After God made assurances to Abraham that he was indeed chosen to inherit the land and be a multitude of people, one night Abraham had some questions about it all.

"Lord, you say you're going to give me all these things, but we don't even have a child. If I were to die today, I'd be leaving everything to my faithful servant, Eliezer. How can I be the father of multitudes of people without a child?"

It was a sincere prayer and received a sincere answer, and very specific. "Eliezer will not be your heir. You will have a child from your own body. A real, literal son." Then he walked Abraham outside, and continued, "and from that son, so many children that you can't number them, just like you can't number the stars."

Then something happened. A few minutes before, Abraham was not a believer. But in that moment, God's word hit pay dirt, a prepared human heart. Prepared, we believe, by grace. Even the faith is not from ourselves. Even the faith is the gift of God. Suddenly the cobwebs were swept away, and in a moment of clarity, Abraham knew that he knew that he knew that this God was not only real, but telling the truth. He could trust Him. And he did.

When man enters that kind of relationship with God, eternity happens. Sin is taken away. All blockage to the things of God is broken down. In one's eyes, heaven becomes a reality that can never again be ignored. Abraham knew. And God knew him. In the Spirit, it is the same outcome of Adam physically knowing his wife Eve and producing a child.

Fake Christians will be told in that day, "I never knew you." Jesus knows everything, intellectually. He is omniscient as His Father. But there are many people He does not "know" in this intimate way.

It can be said of you, John or Susie believed God, and God counted that faith as righteousness, right standing in Heaven. A marvelous mystery, but real.

Let's look at some Greek again. The word "counted" or "accounted" or "imputed" or "credited" or "reckoned." Trace it back farther and you find it comes from logos, something said, a thought, reasoning, a computation. Or think of an inventory. Here's an accountant making sure all the products are in place and the numbers all add up.



Let me tell you, the numbers don't add up when we start looking at our account. I want to go to Heaven. What's the price? Perfection. No sin. Perfect righteousness. I'm empty Lord. And God doesn't fill anyone who doesn't recognize his emptiness. I have zero qualifications to please You, Holy Lord. What can I do to be saved?

Problem solved. Jesus has enough righteousness and to spare. He will add to your account a measure of His righteousness, and suddenly, your account is not empty anymore. How did that happen? A mistake in the bookkeeping? Someone's messing with the books? How did all those numbers suddenly go up in my account?

That we can answer in one word: Grace.

We simply believe in response to His Word working in us, and while we are believing, mysteriously and wonderfully grace adds to our account from His account. It's like charging a dead battery. We were dead in trespasses and sins. The battery of our soul was dead. We plugged into Heaven's power, and that power surged through us and made us alive.

Here's another way to understand grace vs works. Imagine an employer/employee relationship...

#### **4:4**

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt."

So you get a job. You and your prospective employer sign a contract. It says in black and white, if you will do this job for so many hours, I will give you as your earned right, a set wage every paycheck.

And when you get that paycheck every one or two weeks, you don't say to yourself, "What a nice man this is to give me a donation like this every once in a while. He is so generous."

That's not a donation. In the eyes of that employer, your boss, you earned that money, and by right and by law, he owes it to you. Woe is he if he does not pay you what he owes.

That's how works work in the Spirit realm. In all religions except Jesus' brand, you are told up front, Do this, this, and this, and you will find favor with God and His people. You will be accepted among us and in Heaven if you perform this list.

We need to be careful, by the way, how we preach our salvation message to the lost. If we are not careful, the lost are going to think that faith is a work. We say, "You don't have to do anything except believe..." Oops! Whatever exception there is to "nothing" becomes a work.

But wasn't Abraham saved by faith? Aren't we all saved by trusting God? Then faith is a work. No fair to tell people that there is no work if faith is a work. People who talk that way have forgotten the thing that comes before faith: grace.

Ephesians 2:8 kicks in again here: "For by grace are you saved through (by means of) faith. God saves you. Write it down somewhere. We are saved by God. Why do you believe? Grace. Why do you continue on and do works for God? Grace. Why do you love God at all? Grace.

C. S. Lewis tells of his struggle toward salvation, and believing. He says that he and his brother were taking a trip to the zoo one day. He says that when he got on the bus to the zoo, he was an unbeliever. When he got off, he was a believer. Something he could not explain settled into him and made him realize that what God was saying was true. That's grace.

You don't figure it out. Your brain cannot explain salvation. Books won't bring you to Christ. God will. Grace will.

When the Bible tells you, when Jesus told the people of His day, you must believe, you must repent, you must be born again, He wasn't offering a

plan of salvation as we love to do. He was stating a fact. He that believes not shall be damned. Unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom.

So I should go out and try to be born? Good luck with that. Try hard to believe? But my carnal mind cannot do it. What should we tell men to do to be saved when they ask? We tell them to seek God with all their heart. We let them know that even this seeking is not to be construed as a work which will earn them a hearing with God.

We let them know that as they seek, God will find a way to reveal Himself to them, in His Word, by the hearing of the Gospel. He will draw them to Himself. And each step of that drawing, whether faith or repentance, must be viewed as God saving them, not them saving themselves.

The very fact that they are seeking God, tell them, is proof that God is working in them to do His good will. Nothing can be seen as, their earning their way to heaven. As Paul goes hurriedly on to say:

**4:5**

“But to him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

Nothing you can do. Remember Jesus’ parable of the vineyard? A guy comes in at six in the morning and is promised a day’s wage. A guy who comes in at three in the afternoon is promised the same amount. You don’t get what you deserve, you get what God has determined to give you from the beginning, eternal life. Your salvation includes a promise of eternity with God, and you cannot earn that no matter how many hours you put in.

God “justifies the ungodly.” While you are yet in your sins, you become justified. Before you can do anything good for God, God saves you. How

can He do that? God just disregards sin? “Oh well, poor creatures don’t know any better, let it go.”

Jesus on the cross said to His Father, “Forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” He didn’t say, “Ignore them.” He didn’t say, “Disregard their actions.” He didn’t say, “Understand them.” He didn’t say, “Excuse them.”

Sin must be dealt with. Sin cannot be overlooked. Especially this heinous sin of crucifying God in the flesh. Sin must be forgiven. Paid for. Redeemed. Vengeance belongs to God and he will have His vengeance on sin. And He did. When Jesus asked for God to forgive them, He was offering Himself to be the means of the payment for those sins.

Another reckoning, imputation, accounting, crediting, was taking place. God was crediting, imputing to, His own Son the account of sin that all of His people had ever sinned, or will ever sin. A transfer was made from your guilty account to His sinless spotless account. He became your sin in that moment and God had to judge Him for it.

Isaiah 53 again: He carried our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities... And then God took the righteousness that was credited to Christ and placed that in your account. That’s how you got saved. Not by shaking a preacher’s hand, praying a sinner’s prayer, walking the sawdust aisle of a tent meeting, crying your heart out. All these things may have happened, but your salvation was wrought by God in heaven via Calvary.

Your faith is accounted for righteousness. Here’s Bible scholar and preacher Arthur Pink.

It is called the “righteousness of God” because He is the appointer, approver, and imputer of it. It is called the “righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1)” because He wrought it out and presented it to God. It is called the “righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13)” because faith is the apprehender and receiver of it. It is called man’s righteousness

(Job 33:26) because it was paid for him and imputed to him. All these varied expressions refer to so many aspects of that one perfect obedience unto death which the Savior performed for His people.

Once more the apostle appeals to David as an authority on this matter. He will quote from Psalm 32.

**4:6**

“... just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.”

As we said earlier, this salvation message, this Gospel message, though it was now being announced worldwide beginning with Paul, had been around for a long time, hidden inside the words and works of some of God’s great men. David is lifted up as an example of such a man.

Did David know grace? Imputed righteousness? Absolute unconditional forgiveness of sin? Oh, I believe so. Ever hear the name Bathsheba? God’s special servant turned aside to the twin evils of adultery and murder. When confronted with his sin, what did he cry to God?

Isaiah 51: “Have mercy. According to your lovingkindness (not your law, where there can be no mercy). Blot out my transgressions. (Not, let me explain why I did this and you’ll understand me. Get rid of it altogether!) Wash me. Cleanse me. I acknowledge my transgression. I admit it.”

That’s how we get saved today. We admit our sin from our gut. We appeal to His mercy and grace, not to some excuse or justification or blame. We ask God to cover our sins by the blood of the Sacrifice Jesus.

What was God’s response to David’s admission? 2 Samuel 12:13, David said to the prophet Nathan, “I have sinned...” Immediately Nathan says to David, “The Lord has put away your sin.” It’s gone. Forever. Sin has consequences here, and you will have to bear the consequences. But you are not guilty, David. Case closed. Sin is put away. The Judge of all the

earth has heard your guilty plea and has granted you a full pardon. Go in peace.

Yes, David knew about imputed righteousness. Grace. Full forgiveness. Hear him in the Psalm:

**4:7-8**

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

That is New Testament doctrine in the Old Testament, and Paul reaches for it freely. Tell them, David, what I’m trying to say here. There is a way to escape the wrath of God. There is a way to have all my sins covered. There is a way to avoid imputation of sin and receive imputation of righteousness. The Law, though it spoke loudly and clearly, is not the final voice in this matter. Grace and Mercy have come to cancel the debt that the Law imposed.

People who experience this are blessed people. He uses the word twice. David used the word that was actually a name of one of the twelve sons of Jacob, Asher. It means simply happy. Paul used a word that means essentially the same, “fortunate”, “well off”, “happy.”

Not slap-happy, or silly. But genuinely favored by fortune and content with your “hap” or circumstance. When you are happy with money, that circumstance can change rapidly. If you are happy about a relationship, or the winning of a game or a nice meal, all those things flee away, and you are then unhappy. But this circumstance is like a well upon which you can draw all the time. Regardless of your other circumstances, this “hap” is constant if you just bring it up and think about it:

I was lost, going to Hell. Jesus paid the debt for my sins. Now I am not lost. I am found. I am important to God. I am on my way to heaven. Can bring great joy on a dark day. Be happy. For good reason.

**4:9**

“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised?”

Is God’s blessedness, or happiness, which David just described, for only Jews, or can Gentiles get in on this? He doesn’t use those two terms though. He is making a point. Is a man made right and happy with God at the moment he meets the legal requirement of entrance into Judaism, namely circumcision? What if he is born Jewish but for some reason has not been circumcised? Or more to the point, what if he will never be circumcised because he was born in some other nation? This man can never be blessed, or happy?

“For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.”

Okay, we have established from the Scripture that Abraham was made righteous before God simply by believing what God said, from his heart. As David said, Abraham had his lawless deeds forgiven. Abraham’s sins were covered. Sin was suddenly not imputed to our father Abraham. He heard from God, believed God, and God made him right, and very happy in the process. He was a blessed man. So the serious question is,

**4:10**

“How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?”

Paul pushes the Jewish mind into a corner. Gentlemen of the Council, I ask you, when was it exactly that God justified our father Abraham? At what part of his life could he wake up and say, “I am a friend of God. I am free from sin and guilt. I have broken the bonds of my old life and am now free to experience all that Heaven has to offer.” When? Before or after he complied with the outward ceremony?

Then he answers the question, and may every Jew or Christian wannabe, take note:

“Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.”

What silence in the courtroom! Abraham made right before a holy God while he was still essentially a pagan? Before he became officially a Jew?

Paul would say, Not so! Because “official” Jewishness, says Paul earlier, is in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Point already established. Paul became a true Jew when He and God had that encounter of God speaking and Abraham believing. He became an outward Jew later.

Saved without the ceremony. Saved without doing. What religion offers such a thing? If the Jews had read the fine print, they could have seen that they were offered such a salvation. Paul is reading the fine print for them. And of course we are offered such a deal too.

Unfortunately, much of what is called Christian is not aware of this offer. For them, there is a place called purgatory. And with a lot of work or a lot of money you can get your relatives moved an inch or two closer to heaven. Go to the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico, for example. Crawl on your hands and knees for a quarter of a mile, go into the shrine, light a candle, and voila! a soul’s sentence in Purgatory is lessened. What is Purgatory like, you ask? Who knows? But it is an awful place, where you pay for the sins you committed here, *even though Jesus paid the price in full for anyone who will call on His Name.*

Saved without doing. What religion has it? Not the Hindus. Follow the holy worshiping men of the Hindu faith, watch them sit on beds of nails, walk over broken glass, lie down on hot coals, piercing their tongues so they can never talk again, or staring at the sun until they are blinded, or holding their arms up for years at a time until they are useless. They do all



this to please some of their gods. Others are told that simply to bathe in a certain river will take them to heaven.

(Thanks to Macarthur for those insights.)

How did you find favor with God? Simple. He found favor with you in Christ, called you to Himself, changed you, and brought you along day by day, all by grace. It was a God thing, not a you thing.

Saved without doing. That's us. Jews, actually saved without circumcision.

So why the circumcision to begin with? Why go on, if in God's sight the deal is already done? That's the point of verse 11:

But first, the Jewish answer of Paul's day, against which he was fighting: The Jews were convinced that circumcision was the ticket in, and the security of their future. In their *Book of Jubilees* (15:25ff) we read, "... every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant... he belongs to the children of destruction... he is destined to be destroyed and slain from the earth."

A Jewish commentary by a Rabbi Menachem states, "...no circumcised man will ever see hell..."

Other Jewish sources: The *Jalkut Rubem*, "Circumcision saves from hell." The book *Akedath Jizehak*, "Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there."

It was a strong belief. And Christian Jews had trouble letting go of it. That's why the council of Acts 15 took place, where the church once and for all, thanks to this apostle, decided that circumcision and the whole Jewish Mosaic ceremonial law, was not to be bound on Christians for salvation.

Paul declared Christian people, Jew or Gentile, to be the true circumcision, of which the original fleshly thing was only a symbol. We worship in the Spirit of God, not in dead rites. He said that if you receive circumcision as a means to salvation, you are in fact fallen from grace. You are not depending on God's grace to save you, but something else. Only grace saves.

What about baptism? Or some other sacrament? Are these not necessary for salvation? Do we have to deal today with the same issue Paul was dealing with in circumcision? Yes, a new Judaism has arisen!

Romanism gradually became the main philosophy of the church after its first centuries. Slowly but surely God's people were brought back into the bondage of a works salvation. Rome claims we are saved by grace, but in practice this is denied. In practice, one cannot be saved without the Roman rites administered.

The Catholic Catechism claims that a sacrament is something perceptible to the senses which can effect sanctity, make you holy, and give you grace, without faith. You deny that? Then you are condemned by the sixteenth-century Council of Trent. Here is the statement:

"If anyone denies that by the grace [note the deception here] of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted... let him be anathema." Cursed, for believing that baby baptism does not save you.

Dr. Ott, a Catholic scholar with Rome's approval, says, "Baptism effects the forgiveness of all punishment of sin, both of the eternal and the temporal... baptism is necessary for salvation."

(Thanks again to Macarthur for the preceding research.)

So there you have it. Just as in circumcision, an authority figure stands before you and says, "You must be baptized. And when you are baptized,

whether you believe or not, you are saved.” A physical act produces an infusion of grace, and approval from God, and entrance into the New and everlasting Covenant.

No. Saved without doing. Baptism is important, necessary for your obedience. But not to enter in. Circumcision for the Jew was important, necessary for his obedience. But not to enter in to God’s justifying favor.

So why circumcision to begin with? Verse 11.

**4:11**

“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised...”

Did you catch the two reasons for circumcision? (read it again)  
Circumcision is a sign and a seal.

The sign of circumcision. It was the racial mark of identity of the Jewish people. The signal that this man was in covenant relationship to the one true God who had called Abraham out of paganism. We use the term, “outward sign of an inward grace.” Unfortunately, the grace was not always there, even when the sign was. That’s the problem of all outward signs. Physical events do not guarantee spiritual events. You may have been baptized as a child, quite against your will, and your parents or your church will say, See, our son was baptized, he’s in the family. The Jew could say of the sign, See, he’s one of us.

Now if racial identity was the only reason a non-Jew might be circumcised, Paul has no quarrel with it. He saw to it that Timothy, Timotheus, his half Greek, half Jew disciple, was circumcised, to give him the acceptability he needed in the Jewish community. Not to save him or make him an inner, true, Jew. Only God’s circumcision of the heart, can do that.

Notice that the Jews in the wilderness did not receive circumcision. A rebellious stiff-necked people cannot receive an outward sign. They are not covenant people on the inside, why try to fool one another?

But when their hearts were changed, and they determined to follow God, and God's grace was upon them, and the people came into their inheritance, then the circumcision. Notice the order: inheritance first, circumcision follows.

God's presence first, then baptism. The Holy Ghost falls on Cornelius' family. Then comes baptism, proving that no matter when baptism comes, it is not the agent of salvation. These Gentiles were approved of God before the water.

The other reason for circumcision: the seal of righteousness.

Seal and sign could be used a bit interchangeably, but as MacArthur points out, where a sign *points to* something, a seal *guarantees* it. Circumcision pointed to their identity and their covenant relationship, but it was also God's stamp of approval, the indication of Abraham's righteousness. Theoretically a good Jew would see that physical operation as a reminder of how Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness. The seal of approval.

But human nature is human nature, whether an uncircumcised Gentile or a circumcised Jew. When that nature turned against God in Israel, Jeremiah had to declare to the people (9:24-26):

' "Behold the days are coming' declares the Lord, 'that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised – Egypt, and Judah, and Edom....for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.' "

But the big point Paul is making here does not have to do with circumcision of body or heart. It has to do with salvation. Imputation.

Justification. When do these things take place and how? The message is clear. Abraham had God's righteousness before he was circumcised.

That means, says Paul, that this Abraham, God's chosen man of (now) four thousand years ago, is the father of all those who will one day be called the people of God.

"that he might be the father of all those who believe,"

Abraham is mentioned in eleven of the New Testament's twenty-seven books. And in most of those he is called "father."

Though it was a false claim, according to Jesus, the Jews claimed Abraham as their father. "We have Abraham for a father." (Matthew and Luke) In Luke 15, the rich man of one of Jesus' stories sees Abraham afar off, already joined by Lazarus, and calls to him, "Father, Abraham, have mercy!" In John the Jews again declare that "Abraham is our Father," and Jesus, with the insight that is now being given to Paul, says, "If Abraham were your father, you would do the works of Abraham." No, your Daddy is the devil.

But here in Romans, Paul sets the record straight. Yes, Abraham is the father of the Jews in a fleshly way, but in terms of spiritual things, he is only the father of Jews whose hearts have received the grace of God and are thus "circumcised" in their hearts. Galatians 3:6 confirms that it is only believing Jews that can claim sonship to Abraham. James also talks about "Abraham, our father," in his epistle.

"The father of the faithful" we call Abraham. That title is not given in Scripture but it is implied. All who believe can look back to this man as their ancient ancestor. Jews no longer have an exclusive right to him, and unbelieving Jews have no right to him at all.

Remember the children's song:

“Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham,  
And I am one of them and so are you...” True?

Indeed true, for Abraham was the father of all who believe,

“though they are uncircumcised...”

Gentiles! Abraham is the father of believing Gentiles! What an incredible revelation to the Jews of Paul’s day. God has ordained from the foundation of the world that Abraham will be the father of many nations, the Jewish nation and all the Gentile ones too, out of whom believers in Jesus will be called. All the families of earth, says God, will be blessed in Abraham, via Jesus’ salvation,

“that righteousness might be imputed to them also.”

Keep in mind he is not talking now about the whole human race, but those who believe out of that whole human race. Revelation 5:9 sees the final picture, where the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and sing, “... You were slain, and have and have redeemed us to God by your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...” Jesus told us that this Gospel will be preached to all the world before He comes, and in Revelation 14:6 we see that promise fulfilled as an angel delivers to mankind “the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on earth – to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people...”

Yes, the whole world gets to be called, but only the few are chosen. But it is not the few that the Jew had counted on in first century A.D. It is the few God saw from the foundation of the world, and began to call from the days of Abraham.

But let’s not forget the Jews, those actually circumcised, verse 12. Circumcision is not suddenly a sign of being lost. No, the circumcised can be saved too, but only in the way Abraham was:

#### **4:12**

“and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision,”

He was in fact the father of the Jewish race physically, and it is this that unbelieving Jews cling to when they claim Abraham as their father,

“but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.”

Hebrews 11 lists some of these men and women. These were people who walked with God to some measure, by faith, even before Abraham and circumcision came along, making Paul's point here even more plain. It is not a Jewish – or Christian – rite, that makes a man acceptable to God, but grace working through faith.

Here is that Hebrews list: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, all the prophets... Of course, this list is partial, but the Scriptures are letting us know that nothing essential has changed from the beginning. You want to be justified, sanctified, redeemed? God will put His Spirit in you and cause you to believe in Him. That faith will take you the rest of the way.

Can the Jew still be saved? Why, of course! All he has to do is walk in Abraham's steps. That is, in the steps of Abraham before he was circumcised. Yes, before circumcision came, he heard the voice of God, he was guided by God miraculously to the land that shall forever belong to God's people, he was given promises, he learned how to tithe by meeting and being blessed by the great Melchizedek, he was victor in a battle at Sodom.

Follow this Abraham, and see that he was made favorable to God long before circumcision was introduced to him. That simple faith eventually

brought to Abraham the very righteousness of God, and that righteousness is available through that same faith today.

#### **4:13**

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world...”

Heir of the world. This one man, Abraham, to be heir of the world? And not just Abraham, though it was to him that the promise was first given. Where is this promise? Genesis 12:3, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 15:5, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able... so shall your descendants be.” Genesis 18:18, “... all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Abraham.” Genesis 22:18, “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...”

In Genesis 15:18-21, Abraham’s descendants are promised a specific land from which they will bless the nations. Abraham is promised innumerable people, fatherhood over many nations, to be a blessing to the entire world.

What a promise. Jesus added in Matthew 5 that “the meek shall inherit the earth.” Those who are of faith produce that sort of fruit that makes them suitable to receive such blessings. We are included in this promise to Abraham. He inherits the earth. We inherit the earth.

The connecting verses that put Abraham and “the meek” together are in Galatians 3. First, verse 16: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.”

This time I believe the New King James misses it and the King James is right on. The Hebrew is clear. The word for seed is *zehrah*. It means literally a physical seed, like an apple seed. It can have a figurative meaning, like “child”. But in the context, and in connection with what Paul says later, as God’s Spirit-led interpreter of the Hebrew text, it can never



mean “descendants”, plural. The NKJV people were trying to help us out by using a more familiar word, but they missed the idea altogether.

Paul says God was promising a particular Seed, or child, or descendant, in that passage, and that particular Child is none other than the Son, not only of Abraham, but of God. What else does Paul say in Galatians 3? In verse 26, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” So the promise is to a Seed or Child that will come from Abraham. Jesus is that Child. And through faith in this Child you are a son of God. Then in verses 28 and 29: “... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Huge! Abraham inherits the earth. Through Christ. But I am in Christ. So I inherit the earth with him and all the “meek-hearted” children of God, the born-again that look like Jesus, who said of Himself, “I am meek and lowly of heart.”

“was not to Abraham or his seed through the law...”

He has already proved it was not through circumcision that Abraham was justified, made right with God, because Abraham had saving faith before he was circumcised. Now, if that is true, it obviously follows that Abraham was not saved by the law, because the law of Moses did not show up for another five hundred years! No poster showing the Ten Commandments was in Abraham’s kitchen. No Scripture box was at the door or worn around his neck. Isaac was not going to sit and memorize Torah. There was no Torah.

The law is holy and good and pure, but it cannot save. God’s law was written on Abraham’s heart. And it is that same method that God uses to this day. Christ first, then the ways of Christ through His Spirit. The letter still kills, but the Spirit guiding us gives life.

We are people of the Book because the Book reveals Christ. To try to live the Book without Christ is vain and leads to Pharisaism. But on the other

hand, a man who has met Christ loves the Book, as a woman in love delights in those love notes and poems sent to her by the lover.

“... but through the righteousness of faith.”

How odd the juxtaposition of those two words seems to us, even though we have known Him many years. Righteousness. Faith. A righteousness procured by faith. And not just any faith. But faith in the promises of God. Faith in the provision of God, as Abraham had, remember, on his own “Calvary” hill, where he almost sacrificed his own son. What was his faith? The Lord will provide a sacrifice. What is our faith? The Lord has provided a sacrifice. This is our joy. This is our life.

#### **4:14**

“For if those who are of the law are heirs...”

Another point to be made in favor of his case. Imagine with him that only those who keep the law are heirs of the promise. Here’s my promise, says God. Keep the law perfectly and I’ll let you inherit the whole world. It’s all yours. Just keep the law.

What a tragic and sad thing for God to dangle in front of humanity. We are altogether born in sin. We are all about ourselves from the moment we come through the birth canal into the river of life. Screaming, crying, give me this and that. And that commitment to the flesh does not change until God changes it.

Now here is God standing before us, after we probably already have broken the law, and saying, just keep it perfectly, and you’re in?

“faith is made void.”

A little different word from 4:1, where the Greek can mean “abolish altogether.” Here the Greek means to make empty, vain. You can still

believe if you want, but it's not going to do you any good. How can I believe a promise when the promise is conditional on me keeping the law?

"... and the promise made of no effect."

The angry father confronts the teenager who has just wrecked his car. Son, you do not drive this car until you learn how to drive it! The son could well ask, How do I learn to drive Dad's car if he never lets me drive it? A vain promise. An empty promise. No effect.

The mortgage officer calls. Ma'am, we'd love to have you keep your house. But you're three payments behind. You can keep your house if you will make those three payments by Wednesday at 1 p.m. An empty promise. An impossible condition. She can't pay, or she would have.

That brings us closer to the truth of our situation. We can't pay. We sinned. We are not righteous. If we could only be righteous by God's standards, we would. Or if we could pay for the sins committed, we would. But we can't. The promise of eternal life is still out there, but we don't have the price.

So God through Jesus pays the price. Believe in Jesus' righteousness applied to your soul, and you're back in business. The promise is yours. Not through the law. Through faith.

### **3:15**

"because the law brings about wrath;"

We'll learn more later about how good and holy the law is. But wherever it shows up, God's anger shows up with it. Look at Israel in the wilderness. Given the law at Sinai. Unbelief and rebellion set in. A golden calf. Murmuring. Complaining. Covetousness. All the original nation, over twenty years, old dies in the wilderness.

Look at that same Israel in the Promised Land. The tabernacle becomes the temple. The law of God is enthroned in the Ark of the Covenant. These were a people of the book if ever there was one.

But over the decades the book gets lost. Disobedience set in. Idolatry. Pagan practices. Josiah finds the book and brings revival to the nation by following it. But it is too late. The corruption of disobedience has been ingrained too long. The temple goes down, the very walls of Jerusalem go down. The law has been broken and God is angry.

“God is angry with the sinner every day.” The sinner breaks the law. The law brings wrath.

“... for where there is no law, there is no transgression.”

You own farmland. You take your little dirt bike and speed across it any which way. Travel as fast as you please. Turn left and right with no signal. Slam on the brake with no warning. And nothing will happen. There is no law on your farmland. You're free.

Take that bike outside the limits of your farm, on to a county road, where the posted speed is 35. Travel 40 miles an hour and you are a law-breaker. If the law officer is near, you will pay the price for breaking the law.

You cannot transgress, and therefore be punished for breaking, a law that does not exist. He is not saying here that ignorance of a law is an excuse. He made it clear in chapters one and two that all men are included under sin if only their conscience convicted them of such. No, he is saying that the absence of law is what makes the difference between God's wrath and God's favor.

There has never been a time on the planet when some law or other did not apply to man. There were no Ten Commandments in the Garden. Only

one rule. Cain was a murderer and was convicted of such. Nimrod opposed God. That was enough, Moses or no Moses.

Law has prevailed in Heaven and on earth from the beginning. It is the breaking of law that brings and will always bring, God's wrath.

Paul brings out in the next chapter that sin was in the world from Adam, but that it was not "imputed" or "credited" until Moses. Sin brings death, and death surely entered the planet before Mt. Sinai, but the official recording of what sin is and how God must judge it, did not enter the world until the Sinai event.

We'll talk more of that in chapter 5. For now, the simple statement that if there is no law, there can be no breaking of the law, and therefore no punishment for it. It is a hypothetical case of which Paul speaks, a bit different from what he will say in chapter 5. It is saying that, in fact, since there is always "law" present in some form or other, man is always condemned by breaking it. Man needs another way to find favor with God.

#### **4:16**

"Therefore..."

What's the "therefore" there for? Since the promise given had nothing to do with law, since you've got to have a law to have a sin, since the law brings wrath but Abraham didn't break a law here, he just believed... since all of that is true, we conclude that

"...(it is) of faith..."

What is of faith? What are we talking about? The promise! I'm giving you a promise that the law will not be able to stop. I'm telling you something that can only be accepted by faith. You're going to be the heir of the world, Abraham, not because of anything you did or did not do. Do you

believe it? Yes, says Abraham, I believe it! So now he's got it. His faith earned it? Oh no, Paul won't allow that:

"... that it might be according to grace..."

You think you can believe without grace? How can you believe the promises of the Bible? You weren't there when they were first given out. You didn't hear a voice from Heaven or have one of the apostles or prophets speak to you. Where does your faith come from? Why do you believe the Bible so freely and simply? Grace. By grace we are saved, by means of faith.

Grace supernaturally flows into faith which produces salvation. You only thought you believed all by yourself. Not so. Grace came first. Touched your heart. You responded by believing. That's what happened to our father in the faith 4,000 years ago...

"...so that the promise might be sure to all the seed..."

The descendants. All those who are going to be included in the promise are made aware of it by grace. Abraham's faith alone would not do it. He's a great example, but if the grace of God were not sent ahead to all those that God has included in the promise, those people would not believe like he did. It had to be faith, yes. But it had to be grace, even more than that.

You mean faith does not equal righteousness? Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says that faith was counted or accounted or credited as righteousness. God puts the grace in, faith is produced and you are saved. If it is just you trying to believe impossible things and somehow some days believing and some days not, you could claim that as proof that you worked your way to God's favor. Even believing could be considered merit.

But no man can claim merit before God! It's all of grace.

From the great hymn of Charles Wesley. He sure sounds like John Calvin sometimes, though the Wesleys were on the other side of that argument:

“ ‘Tis mystery all! The immortal dies! Who can explore His strange design?  
“In vain the firstborn seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine!  
“‘Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, let angel minds inquire no more.”

Mystery and mercy, every bit of it. Grace all. We didn’t die for our sins. We didn’t give new birth to ourselves. We didn’t come to Jesus first. He came to us and what could we say to such love as He offered? A total pardon for eternity.

“ ... not only to those who are of the law...”

That is, the Jew. He has made this point already.

“ ... but to those who are of the faith of Abraham...”

He does not say “Gentile” here, but merely expands the borders of the Kingdom to include any person of any ethnic background who has saving faith, the faith of Abraham, who was justified freely by God before he obeyed one command of the law, which did not exist at the time, or before the physical rite of circumcision.

“ ... who is the father of us all...”

No need to belabor this point. Paul has explained clearly why he considers Abraham to be the father of Jew and Gentile believers. But he does add another explanatory Scripture here, Genesis 17:5.

4:17

“(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’)”

“Many” doesn’t tell it all. He has already said in verse 2 of that chapter that he is going to be multiplied exceedingly. The Hebrew *hamon* is not

the normal word for “many.” It is translated “multitude” in other places, and actually literally means a “noise”, a “tumult”, a “loud sound.” Amos 5:23 has God declaring to Israel, “Take away from me the noise – *hamon* – of your songs.” God doesn’t want to hear Israel singing songs they don’t mean. But he uses the same word as is given to Abraham. Much noise implies many people. A multitude of nations make a lot of noise.

We usually think of the physical nations that came from Abraham. Of course, Israel and Judah. Through his actual firstborn Ishmael came the Ishmaelite nation. Through grandson Esau came the Edomites. Through his wife Keturah came the Midianites. By extension one might want to include nephew Lot’s two creations, Ammonites and Moabites. I read fanciful speculations online of other possibilities, but suffice it to say that even in the natural, the promises were fulfilled.

But the point Paul is making goes far beyond the natural. He has told us that any man from any nation who believes in Jesus is Abraham’s seed. Abraham then becomes the father, the origin of spiritual blessing, of all the families of the earth, as was the original statement of the promise.

Not just a multitude of people. A multitude – a huge noise – of nations !

“... in the presence of Him whom he believed – God...”

A very curious arrangement of words here, giving rise to different translations and different interpretations, none of which are seriously significant to the overall text, but which deserve a bit of consideration.

The word translated “before” in the KJV seems to be a key. That word is translated “before” only here in the entire New Testament. “Before” translates many other Greek words, and over two hundred usages of the word in English come from those other words. So why translate *katēnanti* as “before” here? The word according to Strong means “directly opposite.” The *-enanti* part means in front of. So the idea is of something or someone standing right across from you, and very close to you.



That's why the NKJV decided to clarify with "in the presence" as opposed to "coming ahead of in time". Mark 13:3 uses the same Greek word in Mark 13:3, talking about how Jesus was sitting "over against" (KJV) or "opposite" the temple. He was facing the temple, relatively close to it, so He could use it as a part of his lesson.

God appointed Abraham to be a Father of many nations in a face-to-face encounter that stretches through most of Genesis 17. He had spoken to Him before. He had given Him a vision of Himself before. But in this chapter that Paul quotes, the Lord "appeared" to Him and started talking. Abram immediately went to His face. The conversation continues, God doing all the talking, and when He was finished, it says "God went up from Abraham."

God was directly opposite. God was in front of Him, next to Him, face-to-face. Oh, Abraham already believed, according to chapter 15. But now, Paul says, the God whom He believed showed up in person. Faith comes first, then sight. Trust him for your righteousness, follow His Word, but don't be surprised if other encounters occur as needed. Don't be disappointed if they do not. One day all of us will have an encounter with the God that we trusted. Faith will become sight for us all, and we too will all land on our faces before God, joining the four and twenty elders, the angels and saints of all time, worshiping Him and hearing His voice speak to us.

"...Who gives life to the dead..."

Why bring that up here? The promise was about life. Many nations coming from my body! That has to start with the first child. But it hadn't started yet! One hundred years old. I'm dead to desire. I'm dead to fertility. My wife's womb is dead. Nothing lives in there.

It's okay, Abraham. God gives life to the dead. Some of you have hoped for something to happen, some promise to be kept to you that hasn't

materialized yet. Your hopes have died. You don't even pray for it any more. But God, if and when He so desires, can give life to the dead. If your prayer needs to change, He will tell you how to change it. But don't stop praying. God gives life to dead things.

When Jesus was here, He proved how He can do that. He is resurrection. He is life. His own dead body was raised by that same Spirit that gave life to Sarah's womb, and will give life to your own dead body one day.

"...and calls those things which do not exist as though they did..."

The many nations that were coming did not exist in Abraham's day. God spoke of them as though they did exist. And one day, they did.

One day this planet did not exist. God said, Let there be, and it was.

Gideon, a mighty man of valor? That man did not exist when the angel first confronted Gideon, hiding with all his people from the oppression of the Midianites. But God called it into being by speaking the word to Him.

The Seed that would eventually crush the serpent's head did not yet exist on earth, but one day He would be here. The King that will reign in righteousness and the Kingdom itself, are not in place yet, but they will be. Because God kept His promises to Abraham, we know He will keep the other promises He has made.

What does not exist in your life? Love, joy, peace? When the Spirit of God is allowed full sway, they will come and flourish. Because of God speaking His Word into your life, those things which do not exist now, and can only be received by faith now, will materialize before us... just as in the life of Abraham,

**4:18**

"...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed..."

We lump faith and hope together as though they were the same. In English it can seem that way. "I'm hoping for a good harvest this year. I believe I'm going to have a good harvest this year."

The way the language has deteriorated, neither of those expressions convey the Biblical idea. But notice that even in the text before us, "hope" is used two ways:

"Contrary to hope" means that in Abraham's experience, nothing like this had ever happened before or was about to happen. This kind of hope is a natural expectation. We have reason to hope for the sun to rise tomorrow and the grass to grow in the spring. But we have trouble hoping that one terminally ill will survive or that a child can be born to a person in her 70's or 80's. It is contrary to our normal expectation that these kinds of things will happen. Life is life and it has certain rules, and we must abide by them. Yes, and the Enemy comes along and reinforces the fact that what we see under the sun is all there is.

But that "hope" can be re-educated. Do you hope to rise again, Christian? Yes. You've seen how God intervenes in human affairs and changes all the rules. Jesus rose from the dead, as did Lazarus and several other Bible figures. So your hope is now different. Now, though Abram's normal hope says "this cannot happen", something has come along to change his expectation.

That something is a word from God, believed on from the heart.

Oh sure, his name was Abram, "father of many". Hope was built into his very name. But what disappointment, even ridicule perhaps, that he had to bear over the decades as it seemed to become clear that the father of many was to be the father of none. Abram was losing hope. He complained to God that the only hope he had of passing on his legacy was to give everything to the hired servant.

Then God spoke. And Abram believed God. In hope, he believed God. The KJV gives the idea that Abram believed in a thing called hope. No, the other way around, as corrected by the Greek and the NKJV, “in hope, believed.”

The hope came seconds before the faith. He had lost hope. Now he gains hope. Something is saying, “It not only can be, it will be.” Hope rose up and out of hope came faith.

This is consistent with Hebrews 11:1. “Faith is the substance – the realization – of things hoped for...” Hope is born, giving us the incentive to believe. It’s a fine line of difference, but one that is drawn by Scripture writers and therefore profitable for us.

Most men are lost, without hope. When we preach the Gospel, some of them are awakened by hope. They listen more closely. And one day they believe. Hope is a bit generic. It gets our attention, it keeps us alive long enough to believe. Faith is specific. It gives me the ground upon which I can hope.

That’s why false gospels are so tragic. A man is awakened by the possibility of life not being so bad after all. He listens to the false message, whether the prosperity gospel or the signs and wonders gospel or the social gospel and he believes it, because his hope said maybe there is something more, something better.

Abraham and all his seed have been given not only a generic hope, but a specific word to believe, the word of faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham first believed it,

“... so that he became the father of many nations...”

Again without belaboring a point, Abraham was infused with the grace of God to hope, to expect something from God that minutes before he did not expect, for all expectation was gone. From hope he jumped to

outright belief, and the belief turned into a reality. We have already listed all the nations that were the outcome of God's grace and the faith given to Abraham,

"...according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' "

Paul takes us back to Genesis 15:5 here, and that wonderful night when Abraham looked into a star-filled sky and started counting stars, but had to leave off, because you can't count stars. Then perhaps he began imagining nations and peoples and started counting them, but again had to leave off, because God said, "You can't count them, either."

#### **4:19**

"And not being weak in faith..."

How's your faith today? Let's test it. Do you really believe that millions of years from this night you will still be alive and well? Do you really believe that Jesus rose from a grave, and that your body is going to do the same? Do you believe that because of Jesus' work on Calvary, all your sins can be forgiven?

Then you are strong in faith. Because God said all those things and even went to the trouble to have it written down. Faith comes from hearing God's Word. Believe God's very words and you are strong in faith.

Faith, for us, does not mean believing everyone who stands behind a microphone or publishes a website. That's called "credulity". Persons who believe everything they see or hear are called gullible, not strong in faith. You are allowed to disbelieve a thousand things and still be strong in faith if you believe the right things. And the right things are recorded for us.

Prophecies fail. How do you know which ones are from God? You "feel" it? Then you are the source of truth? We should come to you every time a prophecy is given somewhere? No, false prophets have been among us

from the beginning and they will be with us to the end. The true prophecies and teachings are in the Book God gave us. Cling to it as though your life depended on it. 'Cause it does.

To be strong in faith means looking at and listening to the right things and ignoring the wrong things...

"...he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old),..."

What a thing to say about Abraham's body! Already dead. There is an interesting difference between the KJV and the NKJV here: a comma. Now there are no commas in the original Greek. We put commas in to explain what is being said. Is Paul telling us that Abraham didn't think his body was already dead, or is Paul commenting that Abraham's body was indeed dead? The Greek doesn't tell us. The context seems to...

I note that some of the modern translations try to help the Greek even more by suggesting that Paul was saying his body was as good as dead. I prefer to take "as good as" out, but leave the NKJV comma in. Too much liberty with a text is dangerous.

As far as Abraham was concerned, for all practical purposes, his body was now dead, in the same way as Sarah's womb was dead. No life, humanly speaking, left in Abraham's reproductive system, to pass on to the next generation, some descendant. I'm a hundred, for goodness' sake. I can hardly see or hear or walk up a hill. Death has set in. My body has been dying a little at a time.

But God says I'm going to have a son. And God cannot lie. And God has all power. If he says old dead Abraham is going to have a son, then Abraham is going to have a son. And he won't be diseased or imperfect in any way. He'll grow to have children of his own who will also have children. Nations will come, rising up all over the earth. I believe you God. Now go ahead and do what is on your mind. I'm all in.

Oh that we could have faith like that. Grabbing hold of a promise in the word and believing it, ignoring all that our senses tell us. What, live forever? Let me take you to the cemetery! People don't live forever. Don't look at the cemetery. Look at God's promise. What, no sin, look at my past, how can it be? Don't look at your past, look at God's promise. What, I'm going to have a child at age one hundred? Well, that doesn't happen. But I believe you anyway, God.

One word of caution. When you read the histories of God's men and women, remember that you are not those people. Not everything that was promised to them will happen to you. I doubt that anyone listening is going to have a child at one hundred. We honor the faith of these people, based on the promise given to us, not to them. This is where Paul is going in this passage. Be sure you have found a promise that is directed to you before you start believing God for it!

Just for the record, men can, even today, theoretically go on having children until they die. The record seems to have been set for modern men in India, who had a child at age 96, then just decided he was done having children. That is a clear exception to the rules, and it must be noted that men who engage in child-production in later years run a serious risk of bringing a less than perfect baby into the world.

Abraham retains the record for old-age childbearing. That part of him that could bear children, or that even desired to, was dead. Desire leaves men more often than does fertility. Abraham had a lovely wife, in her day, and he was a dashing young man at one time, but the days of their spring and summer and even fall, were done.

Abraham was ninety and nine when the promise was made (Genesis 17:1). He was told the blessed event would happen on that very day one year hence. And according to 21:2, that's exactly what happened. Abraham was, according to Paul, "about" one hundred. Why "about" one hundred and not just one hundred? Well, Isaac was not born on

Abraham's birthday. If you would ask me my age, I would tell you I am seventy-two. But actually, I am seventy-two plus \_\_\_\_\_. In other words, I'm about seventy-two.

So, at age one hundred, Abraham was essentially dead. And let's not forget

"...the deadness of Sarah's womb."

The eggs inside a woman eventually lessen and become less suitable for a pregnancy. Forty-plus is viewed as dangerously close to the edge, though women have had healthy babies into their sixties. That's as high as most discussions of this topic go. A baby born in a woman's sixties is called a miracle.

Abraham's wife was ninety when the promise was confirmed to her that one year later she would have a child. She was therefore ninety-one at delivery day. Ninety-one.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is a story of resurrection. To have a resurrection you need an all-powerful God. He is introduced in 4:17, "God, who gives life to the dead." Then you need someone dead. In this case there were two someone's. Abraham's body was essentially dead, as far as child-production, and Sarah's womb was likewise dead, 4:19. Both were about to be brought to an unprecedented life. Impotence, infertility, totally reversed by the power of God, and the line that leads to Christ continues.

Before Paul finishes this subject, he will be talking of another who was dead and raised up, none other than that very Lord Jesus Christ. (4:24) Death has stalked the people of God from the beginning, from Abel to Jesus to His followers. But the gates of death and hell itself have not prevailed, nor will they!

**4:20**



“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief...”

KJV has it “staggered” which has some strange connotations in our day. Actually the Greek *diakrino* is translated a number of ways in the New Testament. Two of them we have before us, “stagger” and “waver”. Also “contend”, “make differ”, “discern”, “doubt”, “judge”, “be partial.” Basic meaning, “to separate thoroughly, to withdraw from or oppose, to hesitate, to discriminate.”

Do you see anything that pulls all those ideas together? Abraham was given a word from God. He took a hard look at it, ran it through his system, which now included the very grace of God, and discerned that what he was hearing was true and he could believe it. And he would choose to believe it, though he didn’t know fully why.

Faith is not intellectual understanding. And you will note that Abraham went through a process that Paul does not mention here.

Starts in Genesis 12. The introductory promise of a land, a nation, and a worldwide blessing. No comment from Abraham? He just up and went. It was childlike faith. God found him, somehow revealed himself to him, and he just believed.

But in Egypt he had to help God out a little, and lied about his wife. He got rebuked by man, but God let it pass, because at least Abraham was on the right path.

Genesis 13, another phase, a repetition about the land and the descendants that would come from him. Well, he could see the land. God had come through so far, sure He’ll keep the rest of the promise. But I am getting a little older here!

Genesis 14, loses and regains Lot, and meets the Lord in the person of Melchizedek, who blesses Him. A shot in the arm, like we all need sometimes, and Abraham carries on.

In Genesis 15, we see what actually looks like the wavering or staggering or whatever that word means. God comes to him again, and Abraham says, I don't get it. No child has come to us yet. How can I have all those descendants you are talking about?

Here was the hardest test so far. When God is moving and blessing and guiding and we see visible results of His hand on our lives we say, I believe! I'm with you! But when time passes and passes and passes and nothing happens? So God had to assure him again, No, it's going to happen. Can you trust me in the dark? You've trusted me this far.

Here is where the famous salvation-by-faith passage shows up. Abraham says, okay, I don't see how this could possibly happen, but I believe. That's when God's righteousness was conferred to Abraham.

That's how it is conferred to you. Lord, I've been so bad. I know you promise to forgive anyone who comes to you, but look, Lord, my past is obnoxious. When God says, Trust Me anyway, and you say, okay, I believe you will save me, you are saved.

Abraham keeps asking questions, keeps making some faith-less decisions, but God is faithful. You may have messed up even after you trusted Christ, but God is faithful. Just keep walking with Him as Abraham did. God's promises will be kept!

"...but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God."

Every time he asked God for help in his faith, God gave him that help, and his faith grew stronger. God will never make faith sight while He is asking you to believe, or else it wouldn't be faith any longer. But He will strengthen your faith by little clues, other Scriptures, providential

happenings, nudges along the way. We are not totally blind on our way, but believing God for what he has promised is essential to our walk with Him.

When we believe God is going to do what He said He would do, and then God does it, God gets all the glory. There isn't a specific Scripture in Genesis that talks about Abraham "glorifying God." The point is that faith glorifies God. You want to be one who brings God glory? Trust Him! Trust His Word, even in the most difficult parts.

They said – and still say – the story of Jonah is foolish. Whales couldn't swallow humans and the humans live to tell about it. True, but "whale" is not in that passage, rather "great fish." I always believed that story. Then one day they were cutting up a shark back in the 1940's, and lo and behold! a live human being. Those who had held fast to the Scriptures when all were laughing at them, gave God glory when the Scripture was confirmed.

#### **4:21**

"and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."

There are people who make promises to us, and we have trouble believing them because we are not sure they are able to perform them. "I will love you forever," says the man under the moonlight, but forever is a long time, and this man will grow old and die. Or find someone else to love someday. Can I believe his grand words?

Then there are those with the power but who really don't want to promise me anything. Bill Gates could take care of my financial needs for the rest of my life. He has the power, but as far as I know he's not interested in such a proposal.

When you find someone who has the will *and the power* to bless you, you have struck it rich. Abraham found such a one. And Abraham was not necessarily looking for this God. God chose him out of all the pagans living in Ur of the Chaldees, 2000 B.C. He revealed himself to Abraham several times as a believable friend and guide. Led him to Canaan. Let him survive a famine. Helped rescue his nephew. Blessed him through Melchizedek.

By the time Abraham was confronted again with the promise, He was convinced that this God could do whatever He said He could do. Not only could, but would. So he believed. And changed history. Not only world history, but his own, as we have already seen, and as Paul repeats in verse 22:

**4:22**

“And therefore, ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”

Abraham was listening hard here. God was promising a son. A nation. Many nations. The land. Prosperity. Why, the whole world was going to be blessed through him. But when had the subject of righteousness come up?

When had the Lord said to him, Seek Me and My righteousness, and all these material blessings will come to you? I see no record of it. Maybe behind the scenes, unrecorded.

Is it true that the goodness of God in our lives brings us eventually to look at our sin, our need to be holy before a holy God? When I first began to seek the Lord, it wasn't for righteousness. I wanted a phone call from my dad. That's it. I got that. And that phone call caused me to move ahead with the relationship.

My parents got a bag of groceries from the local church. That motivated them to take me to church. They never went back. I have never stopped.

And oh, along the way, I ran into righteousness, holiness, the Spirit, the end-time prophecies, the Scriptures...

Don't be concerned about the order of events in your life or the lives of those to whom you will offer salvation. They may not be interested in salvation, but a cup of cold water or a shared meal or a few dollars might be your part in their salvation history. Don't be ashamed to share the Good News, but not everyone is ready for the whole story right now.

Abraham believed God for the material things God was promising, then introduced to him a new idea altogether. Righteousness. Right standing with God. You believe Me for these things? Now you can believe Me to make everything right in Heaven concerning Abraham. Now you can truly be a friend of God. By chapter 18 in Genesis, we see the Lord God of Heaven condescending to this Abraham, sharing his plans with him, listening to his intercessions.

Good things can happen when you start believing.

#### **4:23**

"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,"

Now we come to the real reason that you and I in this century, most of us Gentiles, are even talking still about a man who lived four thousand years ago. Paul is very to-the-point here. He says, God did not give us this record of Abraham for Abraham's sake, or for the Jews' sake. He's not just talking about an ancient patriarch, as good as that story is. Imputation hasn't gone out of style. Imputation is God's way of saving many people. Imputation is in fact the only way God saves fallen man.

And for those who could possibly have forgotten, we are all fallen. The human race is lost without God's saving us. And the only way He could do it is by taking the righteousness of His Son and crediting it to us.

#### 4:24

“but also for us.”

How clear can it be? These verses Paul has been quoting from Genesis are for us. Bring it home, Christian. You are in the book of Genesis. You were in the mind of God from the beginning and from before the beginning. You were there in the mind of God, at and before the foundation of the world, because that is when the Lamb was slain for you.

Revelation 13:8 speaks of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. When the earth and solar system was put in place, the plan of salvation was in place too. In the mind of God Jesus was already sacrificed, and all the things He allowed the planet to go through until then were just building up to the one moment when He would appear and take care of sins forever.

Hebrews 9 points out that it was only one sacrifice that was needed. When God does something, it is finished. He says, this is not like the Jewish sacrifices that had to take place every year. If it was like that, he says, this Jesus would have had to offer Himself as a sacrifice to God every year, and He still would be offering Himself, as in the Roman mass heresy. Six thousand years, once a year, six thousand sacrifices.

No, just one. And in that sacrifice the Lamb takes away the sins of the world. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive them.

There was a lot going on in God’s mind even before the foundation of the world. Paul in Ephesians 1:4-5 says that God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... Having predestinated us to adoption as sons... according to the good pleasure of His will... He chose us, determined the holy life we would live, decreed our adoption in Heaven. It’s all been settled long ago. It’s a done deal:

“It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him...”

What shall be imputed? Righteousness. The same righteousness that Abraham received. And who shall receive this blessing? Everyone in the world? The Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world, right? So everyone is saved now?

Not in my book of Romans. It shall be imputed to us who believe in the same God as Abraham, who trust His promises and yield their lives to Him. Remember that, even though it was of grace, Abraham had to believe. God didn't grant righteousness to the other pagans in Chaldea or Canaan. Abraham believed God's Word. When you truly believe God's Word of salvation, you too shall have righteousness credited to your account.

Later in the epistle Paul will say that with the heart we believe and receive righteousness, then with the mouth we confess and that salvation is now flowing through the system. Starts with grace on the inner man. That stirs up hope. Hope soon becomes faith. Faith travels up through the mouth gate and turns into salvation, deliverance from sin. But it is not just a generic faith, according to Paul, it is a faith in the God who raised up Jesus from the dead, and he says that first, right here.

“who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,”

Abraham was dead as far as any capability or desire to have children. God raised Abraham from that death. Sarah's womb was dead. God raised up Sarah's womb.

Jesus too was dead. There was no human way for man to be saved now.

Do we understand that even Christ's death was not enough, without His resurrection? Paul says later that we cannot be saved unless we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Why? The price has been paid. It is finished. Debts canceled. Why couldn't Jesus just return to Heaven at that moment? After all, His resurrection has been a major stumbling-block to

faith for many. Even in Paul's day, whether he spoke to the wise Greek Athenians or the Edomite Agrippa or the Roman Festus, resurrection was the line over which people would not go. They appreciate the martyr Jesus, the Jesus of fond memory. Why didn't God leave it there?

Why the resurrection? Paul is actually going to deal with this in the next and final verse of chapter four, when he talks about the Jesus

4:25

"...who was delivered up because of our offenses..."

This part we have come to understand, though who appreciates it as he ought? A sacrifice for sin had to be made. Jesus offered Himself up to be that Sacrifice.

The word for "delivered" is used in Acts 12:4 and 27:1, speaking of how both Paul and Peter were given over to the authorities and imprisoned. We came across that same word in 1:24, where Paul speaks of how God "gave them over" to uncleanness. It's a transfer from one authority to another. God wants to rule our lives. We won't have it, so He says, okay, rule yourself.

Jesus wanted to rule men's hearts. They said no, and transferred Him to those who could harm Him.

A real translation problem surfaces in this verse. Normally the differences between the two translations are minor "cosmetic" surface issues. Here, a bit more.

One little Greek preposition can make a doctrinal difference if it is translated one way or the other. And Greek prepositions can go different ways, even as English.



Notice the KJV says that Jesus was delivered up for our offenses. The NKJV has taken an alternate meaning of the Greek *dia* and says that Jesus was delivered up “because of” our offenses.

Leaving the Greek for a moment, let’s look at the English. Do “for” and “because of” mean the same to us? “I’d be willing to die for you.” That means, if I had to donate an organ, or take a bullet aimed at your body, I’d do it in a minute.

Or we could say, I think I’m going to die because of you. That’s a statement of blame. You gave me the wrong medicine. You crashed the car I was riding in.

I notice that most translations follow the KJV here, and stay with “for.” The Amplified says “because of” in this part of the verse, then says “to secure” in the last part. That’s an interpretation, and a good one, I think, but not a translation.

Both KJV and NKJV wanted to be consistent, and translate *dia* the same way. Although “because of” makes Biblical sense in part A, it’s a little stiff in part B. Let’s look at that:

“...and was raised [for, because of] our justification.”

To put “because of” there makes it sound like justification came first, then came His resurrection. “For”, on the other hand, means that it was the resurrection that justified us.

Which is it? Back to that question: Why did Jesus absolutely have to rise from the dead?

Imagine if Jesus had not raised. What have we then? Just another dead man who made a lot of big claims. But He’s gone. He said He was the Son of God. He said he would rise the third day. He said we too will be raised and live forever with Him. He promised all this and so much more.

And if He does not rise? What then? None of the promises are true. He was not the Savior from sin after all. He did not have the power over death and hell after all. A dead dishonest Messiah is no Messiah at all. The Jews had had their Messiahs before. They would have others later.

But none rose from the dead! Except Jesus. It was the resurrection that God used to point to His Son. It was the resurrection that had to be seen by eyewitnesses and written in a book for us. And if we believe that God raised this Jesus, this Messiah, from the dead, we also believe in the atonement He effected at his death.

Salvation was finished on the cross. It was *declared* by His resurrection. One without the other will not work. A bloodless salvation or a salvation without a resurrection, impossible.

I think KJV has it right. He was raised *for* our justification. We must believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, just as Abraham, in this precious fourth chapter of Romans, and the book of Genesis, believed God that God would raise up his dead fertility and Sarah's dead womb, and produce a son. Not just any son, but a son whose line would one day produce *the* Son.

That faith justifies us before God. Makes us righteous. Puts us in right standing.

#### **5:1**

“Therefore, having been justified by faith...”

The legal brief continues. Since Abraham was justified by faith, not circumcision, since he was not made righteous by keeping of the law, since he was given an imputed righteousness even though in himself he was not righteous, and since all of this was written to show us that we too can be justified by faith, and since we have been justified by faith, therefore...

“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Notice the tense of the verb. Not “we will have peace” but we have it right now. Peace with God is reconciliation with God. We have had this peace since Jesus said , “It is finished.” The bondage of the law is finished. Our necessary separation from God is finished. The price for the end of the war is finished. Sin is dealt with. Death itself is defeated. We have peace.

Notice also the meaning of this sentiment. Not, “we feel peaceful”, but we have peace. There’s a huge difference. A soldier stranded on an island in the Pacific may not know that the Asian War in World War II is finished. But peace there is, whether the soldier knows it or not.

Because of Jesus’ victory, peace was declared between God and all those who trust Jesus’ work. We have it. It’s objective. When you truly believe that, you are aware of it, and the awareness is a wonderful thing. Tomorrow the awareness may fade, but the peace is still real. It’s an accomplished fact that does not change with your daily changes of feeling.

Some people feel saved one day, then get involved in some stupidity, and start feeling unsaved. Your salvation, your faith is not an on-and-off matter. We have peace. Period. Salvation is not about how you feel but what Jesus did.

Let me be quick to add that a person who never feels and appreciates the peace Jesus purchased either has never been saved, or needs to be called here and now to repent of whatever it is that is clouding what is to be the bright sunshine of His Presence.

If your salvation is dependent on your daily actions or daily feelings you are no better off than the Jews of Paul’s day who trusted the rabbis more

than God. Or Muslims who trust Muhammad more than the Gospel of Christ. Take your pick.

A religion that depends on your performance is not Christ's religion, but a false one. Look not to your sanctification but to His justification for your peace. Turn your eyes on Jesus, get them off of yourself!

Let's read a clear statement of Paul elsewhere, Colossians 1:19-20. "For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him [Jesus] to reconcile all things to Himself [the Father], by Him [Jesus], whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

I borrow this illustration from MacArthur. He says that the Roman soldiers of this time period wore heavy boots with spikes in them to hold them firm to the ground when fighting the enemy. You may have wondered why Paul encouraged Christians, as part of their battle dress, to put on their feet "the gospel of peace."

Fighting in a battle, but clothed in part with peace. Could it be that this means that whatever the struggle we face against the enemy of our souls, we can rest assured and stay firmly grounded by knowing the peace has already been won by what Jesus did. The battle may be fierce and dark and long, but the peace is already assured. No matter what happens in the battle, nothing is going to be able to separate us from Christ's reconciling work. We are at peace with God, and it is well with our souls.

And that's not the only result of our justification...

## **5:2**

"Through whom [Jesus] also we have access by faith ..."

Peace with God. Reconciled to God. And now that we're in, we have access... That's an interesting word. It means "admission" in the Greek. In

English, “permission, liberty, or ability to enter, approach, or pass to and from a place or to communicate with a person or thing...”

Go to Mt. Sinai. Moses, “set bounds for the people all around, saying, Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death!... do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them...” (Exodus) No access.

But I have come to the Lord often, and lived to tell it. I have access. I’m special. Not in my flesh. Not in my person. Because of Christ.

It didn’t get much better in Israel. In the Tabernacle and later the Temple, there was the holy place where the priests ministered. We could say that we are priests of God today. But in the Most Holy place, says Hebrews, the High Priest alone could enter (I’m using Hebrews 9 as a reference here), once a year, and only with blood to offer. Access to the Holiest of all was not granted to anyone else any other time.

Then comes Jesus. He entered the heavenly Temple, did away with the earthly one altogether, and gave us access too. Hebrews 10:19 ff, “Therefore brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near in full assurance of faith...” Exactly what Paul has just told us. Access to God Almighty through the blood of His Son.

Paul repeats this idea in Ephesians 2:13-14: “But now in Christ, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace...” Our job is to be sure that others know that they have access to God through Christ and through no other way.

“...into this grace in which we stand...”

So how do you stay saved? Try real hard? Keep on believing, brother!

No, You will continue to be guided along the pathway to Heaven by God's grace, the grace that saved you to begin with. You heard a preached Word from a man but really from heaven, you believed it. Christ came in. That was all grace. You were involved in it, but think back. All the people around you heard the same word and their hearts were hard. You were given grace. Little by little He has been giving you other words, and by grace you have believed them and overcome flesh and moved on with God.

That process is grace. Every step of the way, God initiated a move and drew you into it. But I fell! But God picked you up again. But I rebelled. God overcame your rebellion. So when the Enemy comes around to whisper failure in your ear, and tell you that you are defeated, you stand tall. Why? Because of my works? No, you just admitted you failed. Because I believe the Bible still? No, the devils believe the Bible. You will stand against his lies by mentioning the word "grace." God began a work in me. God is going to finish the work in me. I may falter. He will not.

The God that brought you to Christ will keep you in Christ. Paul was convinced, and we must be too, that Jesus is able to guard what I have committed to Him until the day of His return for me. Who can bring a charge against the Lord's elect? Not even the devil himself! Tell him you will stand because of God's grace.

"... and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

So, because of our being justified by faith, 1. We have peace. 2. We have access. 3. We rejoice in hope. We're happy because we have hope. Why are you happy? Is Christ the source of your happiness? He's given you peace. He's given you access to all of Heaven even now. He must be your happiness. You have something to look forward to.

A similar thought is in 2 Corinthians 3:18. I paraphrase. We are not like Moses was when he covered his face after his encounter with God. We have no veil over our face or over our understanding or thinking as we

look into a virtual mirror and see the very glory of God. And while we look, we are being transformed into this image we are beholding, from smaller glory to greater glory to greater glory, more and more the Spirit of God has begun His glorifying work in us.

Later in Romans Paul will tell us (chapter 8) of a group of people God foreknew, then predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, then called, and justified, and glorified. Notice “glorified” is not in the future, because the process of being made glorious has already begun. This idea overlaps with the idea of sanctification. That’s not a conformity to man-made rules. That’s the very presence of God in us, making us holy, transforming us into the image of Christ.

This was all foretold in John 17, when Jesus prayed for all his disciples, “... the glory which You have given Me, I have given to them...” It had already begun in the lives of the eleven. Through the outpouring at Pentecost, the process would begin in many others.

Back here in chapter 5, Paul is looking at the finished product. We are happy because we are looking forward to our total transformation from what we are now to what God has planned for us to become then.

Look at John’s words in 1 John 3:2. Again I paraphrase. For the time being, we are children of God. But we have not even begun to imagine what we one day will be. All we know is that when Jesus comes back to receive us we are going to be just like Him... if you have this hope in you, echoing Paul here, you purify yourself just as He is pure and holy.

He goes on to tell the believers to stay far from sin. Let the process continue. You slow down the process when you mess with the world, or give in to sinful habits, or listen to the Devil. God’s at work in you. Let Him do His work. And you will see yourself actually growing in the very glory of God. God’s holiness. God’s power. God’s love.

**5:3**

“And not only that...”

Like the guy on TV that says, “But wait! There’s more...” Peace. Access. The very glory of God. What else?

“...but we also glory in tribulations...”

Once more we see an inconsistency in translation. This time it is in the KJV. This is in the category of “interesting”, not serious, but worthy of note.

In verse 2 a Greek word is translated rejoice, but here in verse 3 the word is translated “glory.” Other translations say “rejoice” both times, one says “exult” both times, and one says “boast” both times. All these words are related, but there is a little distance between rejoicing and boasting. Nevertheless, the Greek word means “boast.” It can be a negative or positive meaning, but it is boasting that’s being talked about, and you will see that word translated “boast” in other parts of Paul’s writings.

2 Corinthians 11:16 finds Paul “boasting” about himself, to shame the Corinthians. Ephesians 2:9, we’re not saved by works, lest any man should boast. Same word. “To boast and call attention to something that is a source of pride” is the English meaning, and it fits here.

Everyone is proud about something. Quite often it is vainglorious. Self. Family. Job. Possessions. What do we boast about? I have a hope that one day I will be like Jesus. And here, I want to brag about the troubles I go through for Jesus’ sake. Though most of us complain when we are persecuted for righteousness, both Jesus and Paul tell us it is a blessed event, to be boasting about. Look, look, I’m being hurt for Christ’s sake, isn’t it glorious?

Granted, there are those who use the persecution word who have no right to it. Some see persecution where it does not exist. When a Christian does something bad and the world notices it and says or does something



in return, you are not being persecuted. You are being discovered. You did something bad. You have actually brought shame to Christ and have no right to be boasting about your persecution. Best keep the mouth closed at this time, and repent.

But when there is a knock on the door in the middle of the night, and you are herded off to prison because a Bible was found in your possession, or it was discovered that you were meeting secretly with other believers, or that you were teaching your children the ways of God, then you can boast. Inwardly of course. It's not a carnal pride thing. It's an inner satisfaction that you are right on track. The enemy will try to make you feel guilty but you will be boasting in God. As in Psalm 34:2, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord."

Romans 8:18 helps us to put together the two boastings of Romans 5:2 and 3. "The sufferings [for Christ] of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed." We boast about these sufferings. And we further boast because these sufferings will eventually produce that glory we are after.

One final word of clarification about tribulation, or trouble. Some Christians eat too much or practice harmful habits, then get very sick, and want to claim they are suffering for Jesus, when they are suffering because of their own unwise decisions. It is hard to boast about such tribulation.

Some Christians make foolish mistakes, and though born again, may wind up in jail or in poverty for a while. These are tribulations for sure, and we who have mercy must practice that mercy on them, bringing them out of their failure by repentance and proper living. But none of that has to do with the tribulations we glory in, or boast in.

But we do boast in the troubles that come our way because we profess Christ,

“... knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;”

KJV has “patience” here. But this is not the kind of patience we think of when we are dealing with a troublesome spouse or child. “Oh you try my patience!” we say, or, I’m tired of waiting on you all the time. Will you hurry up? Why isn’t my supper ready? How long does it take you to get dressed? We are going to be late for church. Move!

That kind of patience is a needed virtue to be sure. But it is only indirectly related to this passage. We saw this word back in 2:7, when Paul was talking about those who are seeking for immortality as being people who by “patient continuance” keep doing good.

The word means “endurance.” Persecution the first time may bring you to panic. But keep being persecuted for righteousness’ sake and you learn to endure. That first rejection or blow or attack may put you in shock for a while, but God may allow it to continue until you have learned endurance. There are stories of God’s prisoners who learned endurance so well that they were even a bit disappointed when their sentence was up. They were prospering in persecution. Boasting in it. Happy in it. Finding the Presence of God to be real in it.

Interesting that he has been talking about justification and faith and grace and now he’s talking about the troubles that will come your way when Christ is in you. You can’t talk about one without talking about the other. But cheer up, says Paul, this trouble will produce endurance.

More:

**5:4**

“and perseverance, character [experience, KJV]”

Now here the KJV and the NKJV seem to be worlds apart. Must go back to the Greek again. We want to know what to expect if we endure long

enough. The word is *dokime*. Remember the old song, “Tested and tried we’re oft made to wonder how it could be thus all the day long...”

Tested and tried. Proved character. How did you feel when the teacher gave you a test and you aced it? I’ve been tested and I have been proved to be excellent in this subject. How do you feel when the Lord allows a test through persecution or some Satanic attack, and you pass it with flying colors. Not just a feeling, but a fact. You are approved. Your character is real.

Macarthur says that *dokime* was used of the test made of precious metals to demonstrate their purity. That test was not just a placement of the ore in a tub of water, with a little scrubbing here and there. Precious metals are tested by fire. Sound familiar?

1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...”  
“May” try you? No, “is to” try you. This is going to happen. Your life will be proceeding along in Jesus, with joys of knowing Him, reading His Word, loving His people, then one day, the fire will begin to burn. You’ll be in the furnace of affliction. And you’ll think you’re never coming out. And the questions will arise.

True saints will be able to lift up their eyes in this furnace, as did Job (23:10), who said by simple faith, “He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”

David encourages us in those dark times by saying that yes, “many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

And when you are delivered. When you come out of the furnace, you will be a man or woman of character, approved in Heaven. Men may approve you here before any furnace. You may be praised and coddled and cuddle up to Daddy all you want, but Daddy knows best and He’s going to get the best out of each of His kids, even if it means a furnace.

And, also like Job, you'll be in there screaming, But I don't deserve this! I'm a good guy, I am. And all your friends will start saying that you probably do deserve it. Just repent and all will go well, they will say.

Here you were living for God, upright, caring, loving, and God says, there's more. Follow me through yonder fire, let's go on unto perfection. And off you go. Not to the woodshed, but to the refinery. To be approved, given godly character. And we who watch such a person going through this must encourage and bless, not assume and tear down.

Peter gives us one little warning here. Not everyone who is suffering needs to be pitied. There are sufferers who really did something obviously wrong, and they really do need to repent. Paul is not speaking of them.

So what else follows from justification? We get peace, access to God, hope for the glory of God, rejoicing in the middle of persecution, ability to endure, a proven character. Then Paul circles back to hope.

"... and character, hope."

Hope? I thought we already had hope. We rejoice in hope that God's glory is going to be revealed in us, right? Then comes trouble, but we're still rejoicing. God's enduring power is being built in us, and that is producing character. Which produces more hope.

You put the seed in the ground. The plant grows and produces fruit, and what else? More seed! Hope, carefully nurtured, brings forth more hope. You start giving to God. Your gifts bless others, and God finds ways to bless you more so you can give more. That's not prosperity Gospel, but it is true that givers are blessed.

You plant a word of encouragement in someone's life. And when you need it, the word of encouragement will be there for you. Like produces like. Hope produces more hope. And hope will never make you ashamed.

New King James says disappointed. That's weak, in my opinion. Here's a case where the correction didn't correct anything. The same word is used in 1 Peter 3:16, and the NKJV rightly translates it "ashamed." He's talking about how unbelievers will defame you, but when they see your good works, *they'll* be ashamed.

The translators were trying to soften the blow here in Romans, but the word "ashamed" is proper. Now we need to see why. Why is Paul even suggesting shame or even disappointment, in connection with hope?

I believe he was thinking along the same lines as Peter. Folks, our faith is foolishness to the world. The things we believe and expect to happen, outrageous. The very glory of God is going to be manifest in us. We really expect the skies to break open one day, and Christ to come and catch up His people and judge the living and the dead and spare us? Is that our hope?

But that's foolishness. Life has been going on for these thousands of years with no interruptions. You've gotten older and maybe a little nicer, but the glory of God transforming your entire body?

But you are not ashamed of that hope, are you? For you it's just as real as anything anyone can see or experience. And there's a good reason for this: read on...

"... because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

It's the Holy Spirit that gives us this hope. Want to know that the Spirit of God is in you? One proof is that you believe from the heart the things God has said in His Word. We think in opposite terms. "Oh if I could just believe that the Bible is true He would give me the Holy Spirit." No, if you could just receive the Holy Spirit, you would believe the Bible. Jesus said, You must be born again, or from above. When the Spirit is in us, we believe.

If you are ashamed of your hope, or if you don't have a certain hope or if you really can't believe the Scriptures, never could, you need a transformation from Heaven.

Notice that Paul mentions the love of God as being the reason for the hope of glory. Not love as a fruit that He produces in us and that is the highest level of Christian perfection, but His love for us. It is His love that comes in first. That love is described and defined in the next three verses.

That is when you are visited by the love of God, or perhaps I should say, made aware of the love of God, not in your head only, but in your heart, as he says here. When you realize what He did for you, you are free to believe all the promises that God has made. The Word comes alive. Your hope grows. It's all connected.

Before we move on, be sure you understand that without the Holy Spirit you cannot love this Book. You cannot have hope about anything. People who try to get in religious debates all the time just to show how smart they are will one day realize that all they had was a headful of facts. And they will be the first to tell you they are confused by most of those facts. The child of God has a new friend. He/she pores over the Scriptures constantly to see what else the loving Father has given to hope for.

Spirit first though, or the Word is a dead letter. Go after God. Then the Word of God.

Paul explains for us in verses 6 -8 why He introduced the idea of the love of God right here. It's not just a feeling, although our response to His love is often emotional. It is and was some actions that God took. Those actions were communicated to us, and our heart got hold of it.

It's with the heart that man is to believe. From the "gut" if I may be so vulgar. Deep inside, a connection is made and you just know you've been visited.

## 5:6

“For when we were still without strength...”

He’s talking here about people in general, or specifically the church of all generations. Whoever they are, Paul calls them strengthless. Not just low in energy. Not a little tired. No strength at all to save ourselves. As dead as Sarah’s womb. Hopeless. Still hopeless. Meaning this has been going on a long time. From Adam we were, as a race, lost. He returns to the message of his first chapters. You were lost then and by the time Jesus came into the world, you were still that way.

I mean, if mankind was going to save itself, it had 4,000 years to do it, but things only got worse. God put a law in place in the middle of all that hopelessness to show not only the Jews but all of us just how helpless we were to be obedient servants of God!

“... in due time...”

Paul uses the same word, “set time” [*kairos* in the Greek] in 1 Corinthians 4:5, “judge nothing before the “set” time. In 2 Corinthians he talks about an accepted time, namely the very day of salvation in which we live. The antichrist, in 2 Thessalonians 2, will be revealed in his time. The set time for Paul’s departure from the planet is mentioned in 2 Timothy. The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, says Peter. There is the fullness of times. Set times and seasons.

There is a time and a place for everything, says Solomon. And God has ordained every one of them. Jesus died at the right time. The stage was set perfectly. The sinfulness of the creation was manifest. Thousands of years of God’s dealings with humanity. The exceeding sinfulness of sin was obvious.

God's chosen people themselves had in the main been corrupted by false teachings and false ways. The world was dark with the oppression of the Roman Empire. Bondage ruled the earth.

It was the time seen by prophets of old in Genesis in Daniel in Isaiah.

It was the time most advantageous for the spread of the Gospel. The Greek language and the Roman roads carried the message of Christ everywhere.

It was time. It was the right time.

"...Christ died for the ungodly..."

Jesus did not die for good people. There were none. If you are still hanging on to the idea that basically you're a pretty good person without Christ, you cannot be saved. Jesus died for ungodly people. Sinners. When you glibly say that Jesus died for you, do you know what you are saying about yourself? You are ungodly!

Charles Hodge, a twentieth century theologian, in his commentary on Romans:

"If God loved us because we loved Him, He would love us only so long as we love Him, and on that condition; and then our salvation would depend on the constancy of our treacherous hearts. But as God loved us as sinners, as Christ died for us as ungodly, our salvation depends, as the apostle argues, not on our loveliness, but on the constancy of the love of God." Grace.

Jesus said it. I did not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners. Technically, there are no righteous. Jesus is speaking of people who think they are righteous and who therefore will never hear His message to repent.



But repent was the first word that came out of his and the disciples' and John the Baptist's mouth as they traveled up and down Galilee and Judea and the areas surrounding them. Repent. And only the ungodly heard Him. The "righteous" Pharisees and Sadducees could not be saved because they trusted in themselves for that salvation.

We sing of that friend of sinners in the old hymn,

"Sinners Jesus will receive, sound this word of grace to all  
"Who the heav'nly pathway leave, all who linger, all who fall.  
"Sing it o'er and o'er again, Christ receiveth sinful men  
"Make the message clear and plain, Christ receiveth sinful men."

Paul expands on this idea in the next two verses, appealing as he often does, to logic. Think about this.

#### **5:7**

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die..."

That's NKJV but it is still a little old. Peter uses the same Greek word when he talks about how the righteous will "scarcely" be saved. It means "with difficulty", hardly, probably not, almost not, "are you kidding me?" in the vernacular.

It is rare for someone to lay down their life for someone else, even a good man. It happens. It makes the news sometimes, one person giving his life for someone else:

"Man who couldn't swim dies saving child from river..."

"Mother dies saving children from drowning..."

"Chicago man dies days after saving grandson from house fire..."

"Man dies saving injured woman in hit-and-run accident..."

Do I need even mention the many who willingly have given their lives for their country, whether Americans, Germans, Russians, French. They all died believing they were saving a righteous nation, a good cause.

People die for other people whom they consider worth saving. Your own child or grandchild, an “innocent” woman who gets hit by a car, my country: these are “good” folks. They don’t deserve to die. I’ve lived long enough, I’ll give my life for them.

That’s how we think. And it’s good to think that way. Giving your life for “worthy” people. It’s rare, compared to all the people in the world who smugly are trying to protect their lives and give them away to no one. But it’s out there.

The next part of the verse is not a contrast but a restatement.

“... yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.”

He’s not saying there are these two classes of people, “good” and “righteous”. He’s just saying the same thing in a different way. It’s rare for someone to die for someone else, but it’s possible that someone would dare to give up his life. If the cause were truly just. If the person were truly worthy.

I won’t give my life up for just anyone. Some scumbag living on the streets of the city. Let ‘em freeze to death. They’re out there for a reason. They messed up their lives, they’re not my problem. Not gonna mess up my comfort by helping them. What did they ever do for me or society? What, bless some alien who belongs in some other country? Send them back to North Korea. Not gonna risk my freedom or my life for some fugitive from justice.

That also is how we think. Paul is about to show us that that is not how God thinks, thankfully.

## 5:8

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us...”

In the Greek, God “sets together” or “introduces” or “exhibits”. KJV’s “commendeth” does not communicate to us today, so we go back to see what Paul actually said. God does things better than we do. One man might die for another if he sees a worthy reason for doing so. God says, Let me show you what love is really about. I want to introduce to you the way I love. Watch.

And there before our watching eyes we see a bleeding Man struggling under a piece of timber on which He will soon be hung to die. We watch as the wood is laid on the ground and nails are being pounded into human flesh. We see the agonizing Man forgiving the very people who are doing Him the most harm. We hear Him announcing the end of the bondage of Moses’ law of sin and death.

We look around the crowd for some good people. There are a few wicked and proud Pharisees. One of their number will become the great apostle to the Gentiles. He died for Pharisees. We see gamblers and murderers and adulterers huddled around the drama and realize that His death was for them. Down through the ages the message has come to us and we are broken in heart to know, even I can be saved.

“... in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

The “we” here is the Redeemed of all ages. In the mind of God they were always redeemed. But in fact, in flesh and blood reality for thousands of years, they were nothing but sinners. Altogether born in sin. Headed for an unspeakably awful eternity of righteous judgment for their sin. While this pitiful mass of humanity was still wallowing in its depravity, Christ died for them. Not because they were so wonderful. Not because they deserved better things. Not so they could live their best life now. Not so

they could be healthy and wealthy. But because their sins demanded a payment they could not pay.

The Gaithers wrote these appropriate words:

“If you could see what I once was, if you could go with me,  
Back to where I started from, then I know you would see,  
A miracle of love that put me in its sweet embrace,  
And made me what I am today, a sinner saved by grace.

“I’m just a sinner, saved by grace,  
When I stood condemned to death, he took my place,  
Now I live and breathe in freedom, with each breath of life I take,  
Loved and forgiven, back with the living, I’m just a sinner saved by grace.

“How could I boast of anything I’ve ever seen or done?  
How could I dare to claim as mine, the victories God has won?  
Where would I be, had God not brought me gently to this place?  
I’m here to say, I’m nothing but a sinner, saved by grace.

While the world, even the elect, was in the grasp of sin, that’s when Jesus died for us.

When was Abraham saved? Before the law. Before the rituals. By simply believing.

How will you be saved? When God calls you to Himself and lets you know, “I died for you.” When you were in your sin the death on your behalf had already happened. Your sins had already been forgiven. Just look to Me and believe what I did, says Jesus.

**5:9**

“Much more than,”

Literally, “much therefore more.” There’s that “therefore” again. Let’s look at his case here.

Point A: People might die for a worthy person. Point B: You are not a worthy person. Point C: But Jesus died for you anyway, when you were in your sins. Point D: As a lowdown sinner you were made to be right with God,

“... having been justified by His blood...”

If all of that is true, that a sinner who deserves hell is now reconciled to God already, therefore I have even better news for you. This salvation you just got hold of is not for time only, but for eternity. God’s wrath is in store for much of the world’s population but you are going to be spared that wrath.

“...we shall be saved from wrath through Him...”

The “much more” appears again in the next verse, and gives us the sense that I think Paul is communicating: If you were justified as a sinner, how much more do you think He is going to care about you as a saint? Sure, He loved you when you were in the mud. But now you’ve been cleansed and dressed in His righteousness. You look pretty good! That’s what He had in mind all the time.

Prodigal Son. The Father loved the son when he was at home. The Father loved the Son when he left. The Father loved the son when he wasted his inheritance with wine women and song. The Father loved the Son when he came home. The Father loved the son when he got all dressed up for the party in his honor.

You had nothing of your own to claim. He loved you. How much more now, when He sees the very image of His only begotten Son stamped on your soul. When He comes to visit the ungodly of earth with His wrath, as

it states at the end of the book of Revelation, you'll be snatched up to safety unless you are already there with Him by having died in His grace.

### **5:10**

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,”

Enemies. A new word is introduced here. A new perspective but not a new concept. We've been used to being called sinners. We all accept that. But do you realize the implication of being an enemy of God and remaining an enemy of God? Read your Old Testament.

Canaanites. Moabites. Edomites. Amalekites. Philistines. An entire roll call of extinct nations. Why are they extinct? They were God's enemies, Israel's enemies, enemies of righteousness. Entire towns, men, women and children, taken off the planet.

David talks much of his and God's enemies. Look for example at Psalm 21:8:

“Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; the Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, and their descendants from among the sons of men...”

You know there are many more such passages from David. And every one is true. We do not apologize for David. God's enemies have a curse on them.

And God says you were once His enemy. Same word. Same category. Same future.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies. That must mean Jesus loves His enemies. And Jesus is God. God loved the world, and the world was filled with His enemies. God's love does not cancel one's status as enemy with a cursed future. What God's love does is give you a chance to change categories.

You don't have to remain an enemy of God. Through Jesus' death you believers have been reconciled to God. It's not an automatic universal reconciliation. Remember, 4:24, His righteousness is imputed to us who believe in the resurrected Jesus.

But if God could reach out to you while you were on enemy territory, an enemy yourself, then

“much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

That's about the same as Paul said in verses 8-9. “While we were sinners [enemies] Christ died for us [reconciled us]. So, having been justified [reconciled] we will be saved from wrath [by His life.]

Saved by His life maybe needs another look. Jesus is in you. Jesus is in you! So here comes the physical Jesus in the skies to bring wrath to the planet. But Jesus is in you. Is He going to bring wrath on Himself? Jesus is in you. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot be angry with Himself. He will not judge Himself. As long as His life is in you, and that's forever, you cannot be an object of the wrath of God.

Nothing to fear when you see the dark clouds gathering around the nations and the looming of the end of the world. The end of this world is just the beginning of another world. Our world.

Some want that world now. Christians who believe in Dominion theology are trying to make the world a better place. They are trying to conquer the various aspects of society for Jesus. Jesus never said to do that. He said to preach and teach the Gospel and the Word. Some will hear, some

will not, we will be persecuted and killed. That's this world. Face up to it. But there's a better world coming. And that world is His and ours. The meek, His people, will inherit the earth. That's what it says. Not conquer it. Inherit it. He will do the conquering.

### **5:11**

"And not only that..."

There it is again, as in verse 3. On and on we go with the blessings of justification: Peace. Access. Hope. Boasting in Tribulation. Perseverance. Character. Saved from wrath by His life.

"... but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the reconciliation."

The same Greek word is used here as in 5:2 and 5:3, and it still means "boast." We're not just happy about God. We boast in Him. We're proud of Him. We humbly brag about Him. Earlier Paul says we brag about hope and we brag about troubles. Here we are bragging about God Himself! It is the last listed and the first in importance!

Think of the person who saved you from drowning. You'll brag about him the rest of your life. Think of the person who brought you and your feuding spouse back together again. You'll be boasting about him or her. So think of God in those terms. You were drowning in your sin. Your sin was so bad that it was keeping you apart from Life Himself.

Jesus saved you. Jesus reconciled you. You can boast about Him. Isn't that what your tongue is for?

Charles Wesley said it well:

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,  
"The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace.



“Hear Him ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ;  
“Ye blind, behold your Savior come; and leap ye lame for joy!”

David said it well too: Psalm 34:3, “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!” Psalm 33:21 has it, “Our heart rejoices in Him, because we trust in His holy name.”

The crescendo has ended. We come back down to earth and hear Paul bringing another witness to the stand: Adam. And what is this case all about, lest we forget? Grace. God saves man by grace. Apart from the works of the law. Apart from anything we do. Witness Abraham has testified, now let us go back in history 2,000 more years, then forward in history 2,000 years from that same Abraham, and we will see Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

Warning. Difficult passage ahead.

## **5:12**

“Therefore...”

Right away we are faced with another “therefore.” The last therefore, in 5:1, connected 5:1 to all of chapter 4. Always look backward a bit, when you see a therefore. Why is he saying “therefore”? This must connect to the last thing he said in the chapter. And the sentence he begins won’t conclude until verse 17. The summation of his concept seems to be:

(verses 8-11) We have been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus for us.

(verse 12 and 17) Therefore – since we have been reconciled – we shall be freed from the reign of death, and reign with Christ. Yet another in the long list of blessings for the justified child of God.

He now introduces Adam and his partner, death.

“...just as through one man sin entered the world...”

This story is familiar to us all. Notice that Eve is not given the credit here for sin entering the world, although Paul in another place makes it clear that she came to occupy a subservient position in the order of things because she sinned first. In this passage Eve is included in Adam. For they are one flesh. When Eve sinned, Adam was part of it, for she came out of Adam. Adam’s actual sin was not far behind.

“...and death through sin...”

This should sound familiar too. God told Adam up front that in the very day he ate it, he would die. I don’t like playing with the word “day.” A day is a day unless the context demands something else. The context here does not demand anything but twenty-four hours. On the day Adam ate the fruit he died. We think of death as dropping down onto the ground and decaying. Death is merely separation. Adam died in spirit on that day, and to this day, we speak of men being dead in trespasses and sins. Men without relationship to God are dead men. Adam was alive and in fellowship with God. He disobeyed. He died. His body followed years later. He is not with us today. He could have been.

Death follows disobedience. Unless and until God Himself brings back to life a dead human, he will die in his sins and be lost forever. Because in spirit he is already dead. Jesus did not come to bring death to the human race. It was dead when He got here. He came to bring life, to give man a chance to go back to Adam’s lost paradise.

Notice that Eve did not quote God’s promise correctly to the serpent. She merely said that Adam would die. God said you will die immediately. Satan denied even Eve’s interpretation of Scripture, and accused God of being untruthful. He implied that eating the fruit would make people like God. Instead, eating the fruit made people to be like Satan. He was a liar from the beginning. Their eyes were opened, as Satan suggested, but oh

they were not like God. All fellowship was cut off, and death entered the planet.

“...and thus death spread to all men...”

When God was speaking to Adam, He was speaking to the human race inside of Adam. When Adam fell, we all fell. He carried the entire population of the world inside of him. If anyone doubts this assertion, please point out to us a person living today that was alive six thousand years ago. Man was made originally to live forever. But no one does, at least visibly. All are born with the disease called sin and all will die because of it. That is the sad fact of being a descendant of Adam. The only two who have not died are Elijah and Enoch. And if we understand Revelation, they have an appointment with death. It is appointed to man – humanity – once to die. Inescapable. Unless Jesus comes, all will die. And the coming of Jesus will be for most nothing more than the extension of the death sentence as they are cast into a Lake of Fire wherein is the second death.

Sin produced, and produces still, death. Paul states it. The reason people keep dying is because they keep sinning. Children who do not know right from wrong, infants in the womb, die because sin is in them from the beginning of their existence.

Seventeenth century poet James Shirley is quoted by MacArthur in this regard:

“The glories of our birth and state are shadows, not substantial things;  
“There is no armour against fate; death lays his icy hands on kings:  
“Sceptre and crown must tumble down and in the dust be equal made  
“With the poor crooked scythe and spade.”

Yes, one day they will dig a hole in the ground for Bob Faulkner’s body. I carried on the long tradition called evil in this body. Though my sins are

forgiven and Heaven is my new home eventually, one day my body will return to mere dirt.

This passage tells us why all this must happen. But it will tell us more. It tells us how the one Man Jesus had such an effect on this sin process, in fact reversing its curses and bringing life where death was reigning. Listen carefully as we proceed. Through Adam came sin. Through sin came death. This death was passed on to all because all kept sinning. Then a parenthesis added by the translators. Paul is about to explain what he just said...

### **5:13**

("For until the law sin was in the world...")

Still not that hard to grasp. From Adam to Moses, everyone was sinning. We've already established that. Sin was passed on to every member of the human race.

"but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Listen now. Sin produces death. Adam sinned. They all sinned, all the way to Moses. And they all died. But how can that be, says Paul? Sin cannot be imputed, death cannot take place, where people don't know what the law is, right? I mean, ignorance really is an excuse. Some see that argument in these words.

But look again at these words and the ones to follow and you will see something totally different. Paul seems to be saying that since people were dying from sin, they must have been sinning, and sinning is a transgression of law, so there must have been some sort of law before Moses.

Brings us right back to chapter 2, verse 14. "... Gentiles, who do not have the law... show the works of the law written in their hearts..."

Paul is saying there has always been law. The law of God in men's hearts is universal. Perverted, yes. Turned around, added to, taken from, but every man everywhere knows some right from some wrong and disobeys his own concept of the law of God, and is guilty before God.

We can't say that ignorance is an excuse. What we say is, there is no such thing as ignorance. The people you meet on the street are lost because whatever version of the law of God, whether from a "perfect" KJV translation or something they picked up on the street about right and wrong, they have broken the law. If there had been no law in their life, Paul says, they could not have broken the law.

#### **5:14**

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses..."

In spite of the fact that Moses' law had not been issued, men were sinning and dying. Look at that word "reigned." It's just what it seems to be. To rule as a king. Whatever the king says, you do. Death has been in charge from the Garden. Make all your plans, man, but they will all be defeated by King Death eventually. You shall be rich, you shall be powerful, you shall be the best of the best, but you won't overcome the King. Not in that body. That body that clothes you now is under the administration of a mighty Emperor. He will pull you from your uplifted place and bring you crashing to the ground and under the ground. Death is King. Death reigns.

"... even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam..."

No one sinned like Adam sinned. None of us have lived in Paradise. None of us have been married to Eve. None of us were told directly not to eat a certain fruit of a certain tree. None of us walked with God in the cool of the day. But King Death is still our king as he was Adam's.

Perhaps there are those who look at the story and say, I wasn't in Eden. It's not my fault. I didn't have that close connection to God and then just defy His instruction. My wife would never have enticed me in this evil way. I'm not guilty. Leave me alone.

But Paul, guided by the Spirit, says, yes, you are guilty. Even without Moses' law, people were guilty. Even if they did not sin like Adam, they are guilty. Guilt has been passed on to the entire race by one man. And every honest man in the world today knows that, even though he didn't do exactly what Adam did, he's done enough on his own to justify the name "sinner" and to deserve the reign of King Death over him.

The sin of Eden was defiance of God. Not just eating some fruit. And all have defied God in one way or another. The sentence is just. Condemned to serve under the evil King. He continues to talk of Adam,

"who is a type of Him who was to come."

A type. Another new idea, but one that is throughout Scripture. Types and shadows. The New Testament uses this word in Acts 7:43, where it is translated in the NKJV "image". The word means a "stamp", a "resemblance", a "model". It's translated "example", a "form", a "pattern." We use it now, Biblically, as a person or thing in the Old Testament that is meant to foreshadow someone or something in the New Testament.

Adam foreshadows Jesus. Adam resembled Christ in some ways. The first man of the race. Jesus was the first of the new race. Before sin came, Adam was a model of perfection, had fellowship with God, lived in Paradise, lord over the earth.

But there is a specific foreshadowing that Paul has in mind here. It is the fact that what one was and did, all his descendants became and do. What Adam became and did we have all become and do. And what Jesus is and did, by one act, has consequences for all of His people, those who believe

in Him. The first Adam brings death to all. The second Adam brings life to all who will believe. This whole matter is summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." One man, one act, much fruit. That's how Adam and Jesus resemble each other and one is they type or figure or shadow of the other.

He details this concept in the next verses.

### **5:15**

"But the free gift is not like the offense."

We called this comparison of Adam to Christ a "type" or shadow. But Paul quickly goes on to speak of contrasts, differences between the two men. Adam may remind us of Christ, but it wasn't the same thing that these two men did.

For example. What did Adam do? What was his act that was passed on to all? Offense! Sin! Defiance! Rebellion! What did Jesus do that was passed on to all? Gave His life. Offered a gift freely for the atonement of sin. The actions of the two men were consequential but as far opposite in their nature as can be imagined.

"For if by the one man's offense, many died..."

This is a repetition of verse 12, "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin..." One man can have universal consequences, effects on the whole human race. The comparison here is the one man idea, remember, not what he did but that one man could do it. One man sinned and died. Now everyone dies.

Notice the "many" here. That old expression, "hoy polloy" is used by Paul here. Here "many" means everybody. "Many" must be interpreted in the context of the passage. Many died. God's grace then abounded to "the many." But that's not the same "many". That word has "many" meanings.

Many of you will be in church next week. Many of you will not. Same word, different amount.

“Many” does not imply “all”. The whole world is “many.” The saved part of that world is also “many.” Different amounts, same word. That’s going to be a helpful idea as we proceed. There are those who want to ease up the restrictions on getting to heaven who will tell us that the many who were lost and brought to death under Adam are the same folks who will be saved under Christ now. That’s called universalism. And it is deadly. A person who believes he is already saved because everyone gets to go there eventually, will never seek the Lord! Words matter. Context matters just as much as the words. Follow along, and the context will make it clear who these other “many” are.

“... much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ abounded to many.”

Paul is not talking about much more people. Even if he were saying the whole world would be saved, that would not be much more, that would be “equal.” Paul would say, “For if by the one man’s offense, many died, *equally* God’s gift will bring life to many.” That’s not what is being said.

The “much more” has to do with the gift, not the recipients of the gift. Much “better” is what we are talking about. Was it an incredible thing that one man’s sin could do all that damage? I have something much more incredible. The Adamic problem came from the man Adam alone. But the free gift came from God! And from Man, too.

We’re comparing what man did and what God did. Freely. In the beginning of the verse, *charisma* is used. Free gift. Then later, *charis* grace. Twice. And another word for “gift”, *dorea*. All three of those words are overlapping. One can mean the expression of the heart of the giver, God. One can mean the actual reception of something from God. But they all have the same basic meaning.



It's not so pretty per grammar rules, but you could read that verse, "Grace is not like the offense... the grace of God and the grace by the grace of the One Man, abounded to many..." It's all grace. Or,

"The free gift is not like the offense... the free gift of God and the free gift by the free gift of the One Man, abounded to many."

Unmistakable message here! Adam passed on a mistake. God passes on a correction, a gift. Freely.

The gift itself is Jesus and what He did on the cross. Jesus is the gift. The grace. No other gift is worthy our attention. Oh if He gives you some gift of the Spirit, use it, enjoy it. But the real gift is Jesus. It's already been given. And is abounding to many throughout the earth. Has been for 2,000 years.

Abounded! *Eperisusen* . Abundance. Excess. Too much! Superabound. Extravagant. Extreme. "Get out of town". When you finally have to push the plate away and say, I can't possibly have any more spaghetti. Okay, but how about the ice cream now? Oh please, I can't take any more, I will explode. That's the grace of God. Channeled down into our atmosphere onto our planet by the one Man. Our second Adam.

Adam #1 had in his genes the decayed seed of disobedience and he passed it to everyone. Jesus has by His Spirit which He offers freely to us the law of God the righteousness of God which He writes on the heart of every true believer. Oh it is much more!

Calvin put it this way: "Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy. Grace greater than sin. Not just Adam's sin, but all sin of all time. That's what the "much more" is all about. Adam brought death, which is nothing. Jesus brought life which is everything.

One more thought, from MacArthur: "The power of sin, which is death, can be broken, but the power of Christ, which is salvation, cannot be

broken.” Paul says to Timothy that Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.” Adam’s disease is reversible. Christ’s salvation is not. The problem is solved forever!

There’s another contrast between Adam’s action and those of Jesus, in verse 16.

### **5:16**

“And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned.”

In verse 15 Paul says that the free gift of God’s grace had much more effect than the sin of Adam had. Grace is life-giving, irreversible. Sin-death leads nowhere and can be fixed.

This verse actually begins with the same thought, with a little different wording. “Free gift” of verse 15 has become just “gift” here. “Offense” is now “that which came through the one who sinned.” Same thing. KJV turns things around a bit, but the outcome is the same: “Not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift.” Note the italicized words by the way. The KJV and other versions use italics to admit that those words are not in the Greek. Here’s how the Greek runs:

“And not as by one having sinned the gift...” Same as 15. Jesus’ gift and Adam’s sin are not the same. But how, in this verse?

“For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation...”

That’s pretty straightforward, yes? One sin. God’s judgment. Removal from Paradise. Lost forever unless the mercy of God intervenes.

Condemned. Damned. Jesus said if you believe in Him you are not condemned. If you don’t believe, you are already condemned, and your refusal to believe in Jesus is just proof of that. He who does not believe

the Son, the wrath of God abides, stays, on Him. In other words, there is, like Jesus made plain, only one way out of the condemnation that Adam brought on us through one sin. That way is Jesus, who said he is the Way. No one who hears the Gospel has any longer to complain about being condemned. They now have the way to life. Jesus did not come to condemn the world. It was already condemned from Adam. Jesus came to save the world.

The latter part of the verse may raise some eyebrows at first.

“... but the free gift which came from many offences resulted in justification.”

Now, how is it that God's free gift, which we have already established came through Jesus' death, also came from *many offences*? How can sin bring justification?

Actually, sin can only bring justification, or condemnation. See Paul's comparison-contrast, it is wonderful. Through one sin, not that it was the worst sin that was ever committed, but through one sin we were all condemned. Oh how God hates sin. Even one sin. The entire human race blotted out by one sin. That's Adam. Powerful man. Brought death. Most powerful men in the world today bring death eventually.

Sin multiplied. Sin condemned on every hand. And God so loved the world His love offered a solution. A free gift. Sin cancelled. Bring me all your sins and trade them in on my free gift. One sin from Adam = condemnation. Many sins from the sons of Adam = justification.

Yes it was our sin that was sending us to Hell. But it was also those sins that sent Jesus to Calvary. There was nothing God could do, in love, but provide a way to forgive. That's Who He is. He gathers up our many sins, all of them, and places them on the only One Who can handle them. The Son made in His likeness. The perfect sacrifice. And he turned our many sins into righteousness/ justification.

What a bargain. What a Savior.

But there's another contrast, verse 17:

**5:17**

"For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one..."

Back to the idea of reigning. Adam sinned. "The one man's offense." King death took over. Adam was the king-maker. He was the one that anointed this awful head of the human race (without Christ). Through Adam death reigned. The principle should be clear now,

"much more..."

Paul loves to show the absolute superiority of our Gospel over the law of Moses and the Old Covenant, the Old way. We are the people of the "much more" in every way!

"those who receive abundance of grace..."

Not just a little grace here and there. Abundance. As in v. 15. One Man, but abundant grace. Adam produced abundant death. Jesus produces abundant grace. So, through Adam death reigns, but someone else is reigning in this verse.

"and of the gift of righteousness..."

Remember that righteousness in the New Testament is not something you do but something you are by virtue of the Righteous One living in you. He creates His own works in you and receives all the credit for them.

Those people who already have grace, already have righteousness, get yet another blessing: they

“will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

The unscrupulous among us will snatch this verse up and say, See, we are to be powerful. We are to be rich. Our troubles can be spoken away by a word against the devil. No weapon formed will harm us! Really? Are you talking about now, or as Paul indicates, in the future? “Will”, according to my own understanding of English grammar, is the future tense.

Look at us now, and throughout history. A sorry lot. As the men described in Hebrews 11 that everyone praises but no one wants to follow. Dwelling in tents. Suffering affliction. Forsaking the riches of Egypt. Mockings. Scourgings. Torture. Stoning. Killed. Wandering in deserts. Hung out in caves.

Oh there was victory. But others would not accept their deliverance and suffered on. Martyrs. Lions. Peasants. Sacrificers. Is this the kind of reigning you are talking about Paul?

There’s an inner grace we are given, to be sure. We have some of the glory of God now, to be sure. But, there is a real reign with a real physical Emperor. It’s coming. We are in exile now but we win, we take over one day. Maybe soon.

Meanwhile death reigns. It all started in the Garden. Bodies did not drop dead then , they do now. But life has been reinjected into the human race. We don’t see our resurrected reigning bodies now, as they did not see their dead bodies right away. But all in good time. Because of the One Man, Jesus, we shall reign.

“O when shall I see Jesus,  
And reign with Him above,  
And from the flowing fountain  
Drink ever lasting love,

(Chorus)

“Shout, O glory! For I shall mount above the skies,  
When I hear the trumpet sound in that morning

“ When shall I be delivered  
From this vain world of sin?  
And with my blessed Jesus  
Drink endless pleasures in?

(Chorus)

“But now I am a soldier,  
My captain’s gone before;  
He’s given me my orders,  
And bids me ne’er give o’er;

(Chorus)

“His promises are faithful—  
A righteous crown He’ll give,  
And all His valiant soldiers  
Eternally shall live,

(Chorus)

“Through grace I feel determined  
To conquer, tho’ I die,  
And then away to Jesus,  
On wings of love I’ll fly:

“And shall hear the trumpet sound in that morning.”

Now that is the end of that long parenthesis. Oh my, what were we trying to explain all this time? Back to verse 12: It was about Adam’s original sin bringing death to everyone. That jogged Paul’s thinking process and he decided to compare & contrast Adam’s success to Jesus’ success in passing something on to the human race. First, by one man brought

death, but Jesus brings life; sin brought condemnation, Jesus brings justification; death reigned through Adam, we reign in Christ's life.

### 5:18

"Therefore..."

There it is again. Put all that together which you have just heard, and we have now another conclusion. Actually it's a summary. There seems to be nothing new in verse 18. Rather verse 18 combines everything in the parenthesis.

"as through one man's [Adam's] offense [sin] judgment [death] came to all men, resulting in condemnation [condemned to eternal death], even so through one Man's [Jesus'] righteous act [Calvary sacrifice] the free gift [grace] came to all men, resulting in justification [imputed righteousness] of life. [eternal life with God]"

But, we have a problem here. I skipped over it quickly. Did you catch it? Verse 15 above says the gift was for the many, and we know that many, overall, will be saved through this grace. But not all. Here, using the same chain of events and comparisons and contrasts Paul doesn't say "many". He says "all men", the same group to whom the condemnation came. If you are a universalist, you read this passage as follows: Adam condemned the whole world. Jesus saves the whole world. Election is out the window! Calvin really blew it. All men are going to be saved.

What say ye to this? I believe that one way to look at this is to compare this verse to some other passages that say the same thing. Titus 2:11 says that the "grace of God that brings salvation has *appeared* to all men, teaching us..." The gift goes out to all, but it teaches only us, the redeemed.

This Gospel of the Kingdom will indeed be preached in all the world before the end comes. In that sense Jesus' free gift "came to all men."

John 3:16 still says “God so loved the world.” We believe in universal proclamation. Universal opportunity. But Paul has already made it clear that ultimately this salvation, this free gift, is for those who believe as Abraham did. Those seen of God from the foundation of the world.

One more contrast before he ends, in verse 19:

**5:19**

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners...”

I think we get the picture pretty clearly. Paul wraps up his comments on the man Adam by letting us know that his sin made us all sinners. We continue to sin because he passed that virus down to us. We sin because that’s what sinners do. Workers work. Runners run. Swimmers swim. Sinners sin. The law of sin and death, Paul will be bringing out in greater detail later.

“...so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

Jesus was obedient unto death. His one righteous act makes us all – in Him – righteous . We do righteous things now because we are righteous. We don’t do good works to become righteous. We start out as righteous, by declaration of Heaven. And because we already are righteous, we cannot but do good works. As I said, workers work. Runners run. Swimmers swim. Sinners sin. The righteous work righteousness. It’s in our new DNA, our new nature.

Yes, the old nature is still there too. That’s what brings the conflict. But when you do righteous things it is because of the righteousness of God in you. That will be developed further too.

One of the unused verses of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” goes like this:

*“Adam’s likeness, Lord, efface,*



*Stamp Thine image in its place:  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in Thy love.  
Let us Thee, though lost, regain,  
Thee, the Life, the inner man:  
O, to all Thyself impart,  
Formed in each believing heart."*

## **5:20**

"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound..."

What do we mean, "the law entered"? Well, if you can remember all the way back to verse 14, Paul was saying that death reigned from Adam to Moses. There was the inner instinctive law. Individuals knew then and know now, Moses or no Moses, that they have sinned, that they make mistakes, that they are imperfect. But when the law entered, man's perverse nature wanted to break that law. We don't like being told what to do.

Ever seen yourself in this area? You're sleeping too long. You know you're oversleeping. You know this is not good because you've got things to do, places to go, etc. Then the spouse, who represents the law in this picture, starts yelling at you to get up. So you roll over. "No one is going to tell me to get up when I don't want to get up." A written and enforced code that is contrary to human nature causes even more rebellion. It is yet another theme that Paul will bring out.

So there was law for those first 2,500 years of human history, but it was personal, maybe tribal, not a revelation from Heaven yet. Paul makes it clear that sin was going on all this time, law or no law. The law of Moses was not a means to salvation. It never saved or lost anyone. Salvation is through faith, as Abraham, hundreds of years before Moses, proved. It was given not to take away sin, but ironically, to reveal sin and actually increase it.

The last part of the verse is a very popular group of words. Let's be sure we use it as the apostle meant it to be used. Some use it to excuse their continuing in sin... (as in 6:1, coming up soon.)

"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more."

This may sound like a new thought, but Paul has actually said this already in verse 15. Adam's sin brought death to all. That's the abundance of sin. Jesus' gracious act on Calvary brought grace to many. That's the abundance of grace. That is all he is saying here. Calvary covered all sin. One act of love does away forever with the act of sin.

Verse 21 then gives us one final comparison/contrast, to, as MacArthur puts it, "pull all the threads together." Here is the summary of all Paul has said in this discussion of Adam:

#### **5:21**

"so that as sin reigned in death..."

Once more the idea of reigning. We learned of King Death in verse 14. He now takes us back to verse 12, which tells us of the real King, the Emperor, as it were. It was "through sin" that death entered the world. There would be no reign of death if there were not a reign of sin in the human heart. Sin was the ultimate ruler, but he ruled and still rules by means of his surrogate death. But neither of these monarchs shall have the final say in the believer's life, for

"...even so grace might reign through righteousness..."

Death reigns through sin, grace reigns through righteousness. Not our own righteousness, as we have already established and will again, but righteousness nonetheless, an imputed righteousness from God given to us because of what Jesus did.

We are in the middle of a sentence that began in verse 20. Grace abounded, says Paul, so that grace might reign. This overwhelming grace that flows from Calvary's hill takes over the situation. Puny sin and death are defeated as conquering grace rides into town.

As sin produces death, grace produces righteousness. Grace is the new king and the eternal one,

“to eternal life...”

Adam brought sin and death. Grace brings righteousness and life. I think we get the point now.

“...through Jesus Christ our Lord...”

The picture is complete. Adam: sin, disobedience, death, judgment, condemnation. Our Lord Jesus Christ: free gift, obedience, life, grace. The prosecution rests. But only for a moment. Suddenly there is another question the Spirit has placed in Paul's mind, as He anticipates how some are going to react to all of this:

**6:1**

“What shall we say then?”

Have you noticed all the questions and answers in Paul's letter so far? Using just the questions of Paul in the first few chapters, we could review what we have learned. See how many of these you can answer?

2:3, Do you think you can escape the judgment of God if you judge others?

2:4, Do you despise God's goodness, not knowing that it is God's goodness that brought you to repentance?

2:21, You who teach others, do you teach yourself?

2:21, You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?  
2:22, You who say, Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?  
2:22, You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?  
2:23, You who boast in the law, do you break the law?  
2:26, If an uncircumcised man keeps the law, won't his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?  
2:27, Won't the uncircumcised keeper of the law judge you who break the law but are circumcised?  
3:1, What advantage does the Jew have?  
3:3, What if some don't believe the law, does unbelief make the faithfulness of God of no effect?  
3:5, If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, is God unjust to inflict wrath?  
3:6, If so, how will God judge the world?  
3:7, If God's truth has increased through my lie, why am I judged as a sinner?  
3:8, Why not say, Let us do evil that good may come?  
3:27, Where is boasting?  
3:27, How is boasting excluded?  
3:29, Is God the God of the Gentiles?  
4:1, What shall we say that Abraham has found?  
4:3, What does the Scripture say about Abraham's faith?  
4:9, Does this blessedness come upon the circumcised only?  
4:10, How was the blessedness accounted to Abraham, when circumcised or uncircumcised?

That leads us to Paul's next question. A serious one, with a definite answer, but unfortunately, not one that is regularly agreed to by us in our daily lives:

"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

After all, reason many, look at all the grace that God sent to this planet when He sent Jesus. Why, man had been sinning since the first of the creation. Multiplications of sin in every people group every tribe and

nation and language. A weight of sin that is incalculable. But Jesus came, died. And anyone who looks to Jesus has all those sins wiped away! Such grace following such sin! God is good. God is in a good mood. Go ahead and sin, He will forgive.

That is an issue that Paul had to address in the first century and we have to address it today. It is so serious.

The very first church council was called in part because of this question. Paul's, or the Holy Spirit's, teaching about God's grace caused the Judaizers to come out. These were the ones who said, Look, you can't ignore the law. God hasn't changed all of a sudden. We've had the law all these centuries, who dares to change it now? You take away the law, and people will feel they are free to sin any time they want.

Jesus is good, they agreed. But Moses is good too. We need both. Keep circumcision! Keep the rituals and the sacrifices and all the rest. Down with Paul's cheap grace.

Paul's answer to them is first recorded in Acts 15:5. But it was delivered by Peter. "God made no distinction between Jews and gentiles, cleansing their hearts by faith. Why do you put God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

End of discussion. Peter has spoken, defending Paul, and establishing for all time God's plan to save man by grace through faith. Paul in this epistle only echoes Peter, demanding that it is grace that saves.

But wait, Paul says, quoting his critics: Grace always comes when man sins. Not only can we sin, we must sin so that more grace will keep coming. As in chapter 3 we read that fallacious argument, My unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, so I need to keep being unrighteous so God will look better. When I lie, God's truth

shines forth as a comparison. So I must keep lying to prove how truthful God is. It becomes ridiculous after a while.

Rasputin, says MacArthur, taught this to the Russian people in the late 19th century. He was the supposed prophet and adviser to the royalty. He lived this antinomian, or lawless, lifestyle. Repeated sin, repeated “repentance.” He said that the more you sin, the more grace will come. So don’t sin in an ordinary manner. Sin big!

The two extremes I have just demonstrated are with us today. There is the legalism that would bring us under the Old Covenant and a salvation by works. And there is on the opposite pole an antinomianism, a lawlessness – under which the coming antichrist will thrive by the way – that says, eat drink be merry, enjoy life now. God wants you happy like He is happy. You can’t save yourself with works, so just relax.

Jude mentions these libertines in his verse 4: “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness, lasciviousness, and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Strong language. Men in the church saying, God is so good. God has just given us so much freely. He’s a good God. He’s not out to hurt you or restrict you. Be free from the bondage. Follow your dreams. Be somebody. God wants you rich. And healthy. And happy.

That’s not what the grace of God is about. MacArthur says it clearly: “The life that is not basically marked by holiness has no claim to salvation...there is an inseparable connection between justification and sanctification.”

Can a man be truly justified who is not also being sanctified? That’s the question Paul is asking here. Let him challenge you to a proper response. Is it possible for a true believer in Jesus to continue in sin?

“Continue” is key here. *Epimeno* in the Greek language. To remain. To persevere. Stay with something continually. This is not the person who loves Jesus but stumbles. This is the person whose mindset is, I’ll take a little of Jesus but I’m going to hold on to my sin every day too, and He’ll keep forgiving me. That attitude is deadly.

This *epimeno* is used in a positive sense in Paul’s writings, to give you a stronger idea of what he is saying: Colossians 1 talks about continuing in the faith. Same word. Persevering, remaining. Staying with it. This is not the person who follows several different philosophies in his head and adds Jesus to the list. He’s all out for the faith delivered to the saints.

Paul tells Timothy to continue in the doctrines he has been given. Stay with it. Remain steadfast.

Both teachings, legalism and libertinism, are abominable lies. The truth is not somewhere in the middle. A little sin, a little righteousness. The truth is in Paul’s answer here in chapter 6, the next few verses.

If you are one who continues in the faith and continues in the teachings of Christ, you will not be one who continues in sin. Impossible! Paul says so emphatically in verse 2:

6:2

“Certainly not!”

As we said earlier, this NKJV translation and the KJV too, place words in the text that are explanations, but not translations. The word “God” is not in the Greek. The words in the Greek mean “May it not be!”

You can almost hear Paul shouting at you in the Spirit. What a crazy idea! Sin, to force God’s grace? Are you kidding? May it not be! Don’t even think thoughts like this! He uses this expression three times in chapter 3 (verses 4, 6, 31). Does someone’s unbelief cancel out God’s faithfulness?

May it not be! Is God unjust to inflict wrath? May it not be ! Is the law worthless because of faith? May it not be! Shall we keep sinning because God is so gracious? May it not be!

Now his reasoning,

“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

Common sense! You died. You are dead to sin. How can you live in sin? It’s irrational and impossible for a true Christian to be in constant sin deliberately. John says the same thing years later, 1 John 3:9: “No one who is born of God practices sin... he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” The new man in Jesus Christ started out sinless and remains that way. Christ cannot sin. Christ is in you. You cannot sin.

The old man is totally sinful. The new man is totally sinless. The new man is growing in holiness. The old man is dead to sin. As Barnhouse states, “Holiness starts where justification finishes, and if holiness does not start, we have the right to suspect that justification never started either.”

What are we saying? A person who continues on in the same sins year after year, though claiming to be saved and Spirit-filled, is lying. He has never been saved. The new man does new things. A new song. New words. New actions. Paul goes on in this vein all the way to verse 12, making it clear to us that there is no excuse for the statement of verse 1.

Continuing in sin is absolutely out of the question. Sin is dead. Christ is alive in you. You died, you can’t live in sin any longer. Many of you are waiting for the punch line, the explanation as to why your continuing sin is really okay. You won’t find it from Paul. But you will come to understand later in this and the next chapter the warfare that is going on. Meanwhile let’s just say what Paul and John have said.

There is, says MacArthur, no such thing as a justification without an accompanying beginning of sanctification. If you are not getting more holy



it is because you were not touched by the Holy Spirit. The evidence of the Holy Spirit is not what they are saying in these days. The evidence is a holy life. God's Holy Spirit does not produce unholy Christians.

Paul's argument goes on:

### **6:3**

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized ..."

We enter now into a discussion which may be the first in the letter that will cause some controversy. Something for you to study more.

I learned Christ first in a denomination that truly stressed water baptism. Unfortunately for some, water baptism was a stand-in for the holy life. That is, if a person were baptized, it was considered that that person had "sealed the deal" and was one of us. In many cases that was true. Not in all.

Roman Catholicism takes this baptism thing to a new and lower level by insisting that babies be brought to the baptismal font as soon as possible, to be christened and have their eternal souls saved forever by the application of a few drops of water. Absurdity. And yet how many have trusted the Roman church for their salvation based on that official act by a priest?

That's one look at baptism in the church today. Then there is the opposite extreme that rules out baptism altogether and concentrates on the things of the Spirit in the inner man. Men are basically being led into disobedience to Christ Who commanded that water be brought into the picture early on, but of course only to those who are able to believe and repent.

This latter group would look at Romans 6, where we happen to be and say, I see no water in this passage at all. They would ignore all the

passages in Acts where people were baptized into Christ, the teachings of Peter in his epistle, and this passage they would “spiritualize.”

I cannot agree with them. I cannot agree with either extreme. A death has taken place, says Paul. Granted, that death takes place in the soul of man, in his invisible part. Granted, water does not bring life. Granted that a man must be dead before he is buried. Granted that whatever is taking place in the inside of man is being done by the Spirit of God, not by a human action.

But none of that, in my opinion, takes away from the simple fact that God has commanded repentant believers to be baptized. And when they do, they paint the beautiful picture Paul is setting before his readers. Death followed by burial followed by resurrection. Let’s explore the true meaning of the action, for sure, but let us not cancel the action!

A quick look at 1 Peter 3 before we move back into the text... I have long considered this text to be a sort of “Rosetta Stone” on the doctrine of baptism. By that I mean that this verse is a key that could unlock the whole teaching.

As the New Testament books and time period open, water baptism was a given. John the Baptist just baptized. People did it because they could see it connected to some of the washings of the Old Covenant, and John said to do it after you had totally repented from sin.

Jesus then ended His messages to the apostles by telling them to baptize also, and on the Day of Pentecost Peter told the questioning converts to repent and be baptized (just like John had said) with the additional promise that they would also be baptized in the Holy Ghost. So now there were two baptisms to deal with, and Hebrews, when talking about the basics of the faith, mentions the doctrine of baptisms, plural.

So now we needed a little explanation. And Peter gives it in his first epistle. He talks about eight people in the Old testament times that were

“saved by water.” Later translations correctly change the preposition to “through” which is a more accurate translation of *dia* . But there is an overlapping of meanings. The idea is a “channel” through which something passes. It’s not a stretch to say “by means of” . Saved, by means of, the water.

How is it that water saved Noah? Water was the demonstration from the outside that there was safety on the inside. In the middle of all the water, Noah was safe. Peter says in verse 21 that there is a similarity here. A picture. Baptism today is like that water in Noah’s day. The water of baptism is a signal to all witnesses that the person inside the Ark, Jesus, is safe.

Peter tells us quickly what baptism is not. It’s not just a bath. Or if you prefer to use “flesh” in the way Paul does, baptism does not take away sin from your old nature. Rather it is an appeal of a cleansed conscience. I want to say “answer” here as KJV and NKJV both say. But the original word here means just the opposite. Not the answer, but the question, the inquiry, the appeal to God. Baptism saves us – you can’t take that away from Peter – not in taking away sin, but in responding to God after the saving has taken place.

Baptism is a witness. An asking and answering from God as the conscience has been cleansed by the Spirit. And here in Romans, it is also a burial.

Burying someone does not kill them. They are already dead at the time. The key to Romans 6:3 following is not whether we are talking about a literal baptism (it is true that the Israelites were “baptized” in a sense, to Moses) so we will leave that behind for a moment. The key is

“into Christ Jesus...”

Some tell of a mystical experience they had during their baptism. It can happen all at the same time. The water, the burial, though, must always be seen as a visible physical picture of a reality that is taking place in the

Spirit world, or already has, and that is, you are coming into Jesus. You are coming into the very person of God. You are entering behind the veil. You are experiencing Heavenly things. You are waking up in Heaven. The scales have been taken away and you can see Jesus in His glory. The One Who died for you. The One Who created you. The One Who forgives you. Everything that He is, is now available to you.

His experience of life and death now becomes yours. You

“were baptized into His death.”

Again I do not want to downplay your obedience to Jesus Christ in water baptism. But in stumbling and fussing here about the water we forget the death into which we have come. Jesus is not a sinner. Never was. He is totally dead to sin. The only time He experienced sin was at the cross when the crushing burden of your and my idiocy fell on Him. Dead to sin. And your curse on Him even brought Him to physical death on your behalf.

Now that you are in Jesus you too are dead to sin. You are in Him. He is in you. In that state, how is it possible for you to sin? You are following Him to a death, a death to sin. To be baptized into Jesus means to be one with His death. To be buried with Jesus means you have already died, the sin nature has been dealt a blow by the Spirit of God, you are alive in Him, but very dead to sin. He talks about the life part in a while. But let's be sure that we are dead and buried first.

**6:4**

“Therefore...”

Another therefore. Since we were baptized into Jesus and baptized into His death,

“...we were buried with Him through baptism into death...”

I don't want to argue the point too much, but I don't see how the clear meaning of this text can be avoided any longer. Paul didn't qualify the word "baptism" here. His readers, and we who read it today, all know what he is saying when he says "baptism." No need to explain it away, especially when Peter has already explained it for us.

Paul is saying clearly, When you were baptized (and you see here by the burial imagery that he is speaking of "immersion" not any other form of baptism) in water, giving your witness of what Jesus had done for you, as you repented of your sins, and came to Jesus in faith, you were in a sense buried with Jesus. Buried into death. That is, you were acknowledging that the old man has died, the New Man is alive. Here was your first chance to tell all your acquaintances in and out of the church, look here! I'm not the person you knew just yesterday! I'm done with sin just as Jesus was done with it. Look at me! I'm going under the water to demonstrate that I will go into that tomb with Jesus as a dead man should.

Knowing all that baptism pictures, knowing all the commands of Scripture regarding baptism, knowing all the examples of baptism throughout the book of Acts, I find it difficult to hear people say, well, I'm saved by grace through faith. I don't need no works to prove I'm saved.

True, true. But the same grace and faith that saved you puts before you a life of holy living and obedience. And your first act of obedience is to get to the water. Will you be able to stand before the Lord and tell Him that you didn't think it was all that important?

"that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father..."

We are still at the tomb in Paul's thinking. Inside the tomb is a dead Man. He has sealed the fate of sin and death forever. Dead to sin. Then God, Who is life, reached by His Spirit into that tomb, and through a dynamite explosion of His glory brought Jesus out of death, out of the tomb, into the land of the living, where He will be eternally.

This picture is not about our one day dying and being with Jesus in Heaven. This picture continues on in our life here...

“...even so we also should walk in newness of life...”

You died with Him when He died on the cross. Dead to sin. That’s your salvation, your repentance experience. You were buried with Him when He was put into the tomb. That’s your baptism experience, your identification with a dead man. Witnessing to all, I’m dead. No more sin. New man coming. Then your Christian life after water baptism. Baptism didn’t save you. It was just your way of identifying with the One Who did save you. From that day on you walk in a new life. He details this teaching in the verses to come.

Again, I don’t want to push water baptism too much. But when you try to mention it in Mark 16, He that believes and is baptized will be saved... you are told that that passage is probably not in the original Greek. Then you go to John 3, you must be born of water and Spirit, and you are told that that water has to do with physical birth. You come to Romans 6, and you are told that that is a spiritual baptism. You hear Ananias telling Saul, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, and you’re told that those two commands are two separate things. Peter at Pentecost answers their “What shall we do” question with “repent and be baptized for the remission of sins” and we’re told that really that means, repent for the remission of sins and be baptized.

I think baptism deserves a second look by evangelicals today. I think it is more important than we give it credit for. Maybe much more.

6:5

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death...”

No one ever died a death like Jesus. No one ever can. Not just the beatings and the thorns and the nails. But the fact that He is God and somehow in a way we shall never comprehend, the sins of humanity laid so heavily on His shoulders that He was in some way separated from the Father. He had once said, I and My Father are One. He couldn't say that on the cross. It was, My God why have you forsaken Me?

So I say again, no one ever died a death like Jesus. Paul says here that when we came to Christ, or better, when Christ came to us, we were united in the likeness of His death. Likeness, a form of, a resemblance, a similitude. There are similarities between the death of Jesus and our death to sin.

Jesus' body died. The curse of sin that was your curse on Him, died with Jesus. When you were united to Him, your sinful past was killed also. The old nature was dealt a death blow. You entered a death that was His but became yours. No more sin. Sin forgiven. Eventually the entire influence of sin in you will be done away.

When Adam sinned, he died. His body followed years later. When Jesus died because of Adam's sin, you also died. We still see glimpses of that old man now and then, but in fact he is staggering from a death wound that will be manifest one day, even though your body will follow Adam to the grave.

Sin is still in the world for now. One day it will not be. The reason it will not be is that Jesus conquered sin at the cross. When you came into Christ you entered into the eventual death to sin forever.

You will notice that I said "united" and your Bible may have said "planted." The Greek word means "grown." Both translations work. The important part is the "together". And here we have left the symbolism of the burial of baptism, and entered the picture of burial in the soil.

We have been united to Jesus in ways we cannot comprehend. As a man or woman carefully places two plants side by side in his garden, so Jesus has tenderly placed us under the ground with Jesus to die there with Him. Is that plain enough? It doesn't feel too good under there at first. Cut off from old ways. Cut off from family. Friends. Cut off from habits. Cut off from the pleasures of the world.

Can't see the things that Solomon speaks of "under the sun." There is no sun. It's cold in here. And dark. But like the thief on the cross I look over to the next plant, and Jesus is there with me. He also is dead to this world. He also has been released from His sin placed there by us. He is patiently waiting.

Waiting for the last part of the verse. Let me read it as the Greek unfolds it, because the translators added some words to make it more readable.

"so also of resurrection we shall be." That's all it says. That's all I need to hear. It's scary down here sometimes. But something else is going on. New life. Now as you read the rest of this passage, you can see a little of that final resurrection of the body for sure. But His point here is not Heaven. It's the new life we live now.

Those who are waiting for Heaven before the New Life raises you may be in for a long wait. And really, if there is no new life here, do you really think you are going to receive a new life after the grave? Look back in verse 4. Christ was raised bodily. We are raised to newness of life. Oh the body will follow, fear not. But this passage is not talking about that. This is a resurrection of you.

Crucified with Christ. Buried with Christ. Raised with Christ. Colossians 3:1, "If then you were (were!) raised with Christ..." Resurrection has already occurred for truly born again people. What does born again mean but life starting all over? It's not, weep at the altar a while, shake the preacher's hand and endure until heaven. Life is now.



The death to sin occurs. There is a time in the grave. But then, as Christ was raised, if we are united with Him, we raise too. Here comes that plant cracking the surface of that hard cold ground. Lo and behold, another plant is tied to it. The planter somehow bound the two plants together underground. They have been growing together. Died together. Buried together. Raised together.

6:6

“Knowing this...”

It sounds like this teaching was common knowledge in the Roman church, in the first century. Or was Paul just saying that he knew this, and that they needed to get hold of it? Whatever, this is a vital piece of information coming up. It's the foundation of these two chapters of Paul's epistle. The old “you” is dead. Just as dead as Jesus was on the cross and in the tomb.

“that our old man [ESV, “self”] was crucified with Him,...”

Old. Not just so many years. That's one Greek word. This one means very old. Worn out. Ancient. Past. Our former man, the one we used to be. Was. Was crucified. Please try with me to get hold of this. It's not a picture. It's not a philosophical statement. Not mysticism. Paul states it often here in Romans and elsewhere. We have been crucified, killed, murdered, with Christ. Not theoretically. Actually.

Your brain is already rising up and saying, But you don't know me. That old man is still causing me grief. No, we must start looking at it as the Spirit through Paul looks at it. That old man is dead. We're not, in this context, trying to kill him. He died with Jesus. Get that in your mind. The old “I” is dead. “I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. But not I. Christ lives in me.” Dead but very much alive.

Macarthur warns against the teaching known as “dualism” which contends that there are two separate natures living in you, both of which are the real you. Two you’s. When taken to its extreme this teaching says, don’t worry about that other you. It’s going to die out one day, let it do what it will. Just be sure to be doing spiritual things too.

We also could call this doublemindedness. A person who allows the flesh and the Spirit to have equal sway. Confusion reigns. Paul is not talking about two separate you’s. He’s talking about the you that you used to be and the you that you are now. That other person is dead. You are not that person any longer. Your identity is in Christ.

He’ll be developing this as we go along. But it is crucial that you allow the truth of what has happened to you, to be your guide in this. The old you was crucified. Gone. Not a command here, but a statement of fact. He wants to emphasize this for those believers in Rome who think that continuing in sinful behavior is an option for the true Christian. It isn’t. You’re dead... As in Galatians 5:24 “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.”

“that the body of sin might be done away with...”

What is the “body of sin”? Paul uses the same term, essentially, in Colossians 2:11, “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh.” In the next chapter of Romans he talks about “this body of death.” In 8:10 Paul says if Christ is in you, the body is dead, but the Spirit is life. Is this the same body that we are to present as a living sacrifice to God, in 12:1? If that is the body that is dead and sacrificed, Paul is saying in all these passages, you died. You are not your own. The body given to sin is dead. Now that body, that flesh and blood, is to be used for Him alone.

“Might”? Does that imply “maybe”? The old self was crucified so that, *maybe* sin will stop in our lives? This idea is all over the New Testament, though it is not a separate word in the Greek. It’s an ending that means a certain tense or mood. I think we would call it subjunctive in English. Just

look back a few verses at 5:20. "The law entered that the offense might abound." *Maybe* the offense will abound when the law enters? No, it just means that one thing is contingent on the other. Law enters. Sin abounds. Here in 6:6, old man crucified = body of sin done away. One is contingent on the other. No maybe.

"Done away with": Not annihilated, as the KJV and other translations seem to indicate. Again the Greek is helpful. The word here means "to render useless." Yes, that can mean destroy. That can mean "done away with", as in the NKJV. But the literal meaning is not annihilate. Just make it unusable. That dead man inside of you is not you. But it lingers on in its stench, its memories. You stopped it from functioning when Christ came in. Rather, He did.

"that we should no longer be slaves of sin..."

The old man of sin inside of you was your master. When the master spoke, you jumped. Total control. Paul now asks how shall we who died to sin, and that sin died in us, how can we live in that any longer? Ridiculous thought! And the next verse confirms it,

6:7 "For he who has died has been freed from sin."

You don't have to sin any longer. Your New Master has set you free from the old master. You had no choice before. No hope. Sin was going to lead you to death and hell. But that old man died. And a new you, free from sin, was born. That's what being born again is about.

Martyn Lloyd Jones tries to explain this very difficult concept in this way: There are these two adjoining fields. Satan owns one. God owns the other. They are separated by a road. Before you were saved, you lived in Satan's field, and were totally under his jurisdiction. It was his field. But now that you are saved, you work in the other field. You are under God's jurisdiction now. The new field is not Satan's, it is totally God's. But as you plow in that field your former master tries to entice you back into your old

sinful ways. Sometimes he succeeds. But he cannot succeed in bringing you back into that field. Those days are done. You are God's. God began a work. God will finish the work.

I want to keep saying it over and over until we get the idea solid in our mind. You died. Remember the night you died? I do. The preacher was preaching. I was hearing. My spirit man got it. Tears signaled the death within me. I wanted no part of sin that night. Life was coming in. Joy from the Lord. Old man dead. New man alive. That's what Paul is talking about.

### **6:8**

"Now if we died with Christ..."

And we did. He has already said that. Verse 6, our old man was crucified with Him. Verse 4. We were buried with Him into death. Verse 2. We died to sin.

"we believe that we shall also live with Him."

This is all review, and as review, we recall that the context is not eternity, though that is involved. The context is living with Jesus right now, as you will see again in a few verses. Paul insists, as must we, that eternal life begins now,

### **6:9**

"knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more."

Paul does not even try to prove this point. The believers in Rome knew that Christ had raised from the dead. That's how they got into the church and how you get in also. We must confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, or we are none of His. Not talking about a formal ceremony, but somewhere in your beginnings with Christ you just knew that the resurrection story you've been hearing all

these years or just heard for the first time, is true. You don't know why or how you could believe that, but you do. This is yet another evidence that you are one of His.

Multitudes simply do not believe the Easter story any more than they believe the Easter Bunny. We are surrounded by people who do believe it and we may have trouble understanding that most do not. It is the dividing point, the point of departure for many. They can believe in the martyr Jesus, who sacrificed His own life for His friends. The teacher and even the miracle worker is accepted by many. But bring up a man raised from the dead, and you will find like Paul at Mars Hill that your friends would rather talk about this at some other time. It's embarrassing.

Do you know that Christ was raised from the dead? Do you believe it with all your heart? Then let's take it a step farther: Jesus will never die again. How do you know that? The same way you know about the resurrection. God has told us that. He tells us right here. We take nothing for granted. If God didn't say it, we don't believe it. We don't speculate and bind our speculations on others.

A Holy Spirit inspired apostle named John saw the risen Lord, not only at His resurrection, but perhaps sixty years later, on an island called Patmos. John fell at His feet as a dead man. But Jesus, who never inspired this sort of fear in John while he and John were ministering together in Galilee, this glorified Jesus said to John, and to us: "I am He who lives (resurrection), and was dead (crucifixion), and behold I am alive forevermore." That's why we believe Jesus will never die again. He told us.

He dies no more!

"death no longer has dominion over Him."

Jesus said in that same Revelation passage, "I have the keys of Hades and Death." Only the one in charge has the keys. Only the one with authority has the keys. Death had a temporary jurisdiction over Christ because of

your sin. Sin demanded He be arrested, and tortured, and bloodied and killed. But somewhere in that tomb where He was locked in as all men are for some time, somewhere in that tomb an angel slipped Him the keys. God raised Him. And gave Him all authority in Heaven and on earth. And that authority extends to death itself. He'll never die. Who will make Him die? Your sins are paid for. God loves Him. He is all powerful. Who can stop Jesus?

## **6:10**

"For the death that He died..."

Notice the italics here. The word "death" is not in the original Greek that the KJV or NKJV uses as a basis. It is added here as a help in understanding, but in my opinion, not a necessary help. The Greek reads, "For that he died..." We might say, "As to the fact that He died". Or, as KJV, "In that He died." Or, "Speaking about His death," or "In regards to this dying we are talking about," let me explain further...

"He died to sin..."

Now that will have to give us pause for a while. Jesus died to sin? Remember in this passage we are comparing Jesus' death on the cross to our death to the old life, the old man. Jesus died. We died with Him. Jesus was buried. We were buried too. Jesus was planted in the ground. We were attached to Him down there. Jesus resurrected, we walk in a new life too. So when we talk of Jesus dying to sin, the parallel has to match. Whatever we say of Jesus must be said of us. And both sides must be true.

In the next verse Paul will tell us that we are to be considered dead to sin. Jesus was dead to sin, we must be. We understand our own death to sin. But Jesus never sinned. How could He die to something He never did to begin with? He was never mastered by sin. He wasn't suddenly made perfect, or sinless, because He always was sinless. Hebrews 7:26 speaks of Jesus the High Priest who is holy, undefiled, separate from sinners.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that although Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet he was without sin.

Of course the answer is in the awesome truth that Jesus, “who knew no sin” was made sin for us. (2 Corinthians 5:21). He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).

Yes, he was tempted to sin all His life like we are. That’s what it says. But the ultimate experience of sin that Jesus bore was at Calvary. A sin-bearing God. How hideous a sight. The sun could not even bear to look at such a thing. The earth rebelled in shakings and demonstrations of rejection of this One who said, Put it on my tab. I’ll pay for all of it.

But when that last breath of air escaped those holy lips, when He said “It is finished”, one thing that was finished was any more connection to sin. No more temptation. No more penalty. No more power of sin over Him and at the same time, over all His people. Dead to sin! The law which brought all that sin to light is nailed to the cross. And since that day, three days later,

“once for all...”

Once for all. Where have I read that before? Hebrews! 7:27, Jesus does not need to offer up a sacrifice every day, like those Old Testament priests did. (Hello Rome!) “This He did once for all, when He offered up Himself.” 9:12, “Not with the blood of goats and calves as the same Old Testament priests practiced (Hello Judaism, about to build a third Temple in Jerusalem, and reinstate Jewish sacrifices, ignoring the one sacrifice that was made for you!) , but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all.” 9:28, “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many... He will appear once more (a second time) apart from sin.” That is He died to sin at the cross. The sin has been removed.

He said goodbye forever to sin on the cross. 10:10, “...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Let

Peter join in, too, in his first epistle, 3:18. "Christ also suffered once for sins... put to death in the flesh, made alive in the Spirit."

How many times do the Roman "priests" of our day (by the way there is no class of priests today, just as there are no apostles and prophets) have to hear "once" before they will stop offering those thousands of "unbloody sacrifices" as they call them? How often will they have to learn that only a bloody sacrifice works, and that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin, and that Jesus offered the only bloody sacrifice that counts, and that it is finished?

"but the life that He lives, He lives to God."

He died to sin, He lives to God. Remember this is a parallel to our lives. The application is in the next verse. But first, didn't Jesus live to God before His death? Yes, but like us, it was with the distractions of the Devil, the flesh – and He was flesh – plus the world around Him.

Why do you think He had to spend whole nights in prayer? Trying to be a good Jewish man? No, the effects of this sinful world weighed on Him like they weigh on us. But after Calvary. Sin-free. Distraction free. He lives constantly in God's presence. Every move, every thought in total conformity to God and His glory. He paid the debt you owed. Remember how good it is to make that last payment on a purchase, to pay back that person you owe. Jesus lives a debt-free life now. He paid your debts.

So His life is all about God in the fullest of joys. It's different than His walk before Calvary. He cried a lot here. Like his predecessor Jeremiah. Consider that last week of His life. There was joy but it was tinged with sorrow. Look at the Garden experience. Stress unimaginable to us. He knows what is coming. The agonies of those last hours.

All of that is gone. He walks with us as Comforter in our sorrows, but His Heavenly Body is whole. He lives His life totally to God. How does that parallel to us now?



## 6:11

“Likewise you also ...(KJV & NKJV, but “even so” NASB, “so you also”, ESV)

Why all these alternative translations? I show you them to point out the importance of this word. Every word is important. The Greek means “similarly”, in a similar manner. That is, not exactly, but in a way that closely resembles the last thing we were talking about.

Look at the end of 1 Peter 2. The apostle there talks about sheep going astray but then returning to submit to the Shepherd. Likewise, starts chapter 3, wives be submitted to your own husbands. In a similar manner as sheep returning to the care of their Shepherd, wives are to put themselves under the care of their husband. In six verses he talks about how women are to conform to the pattern of godliness and submission.

Then he turns his attention to the men, and again says “likewise.” In a similar manner as they honor you, men, “give honor to the wife.” It’s not exactly the same. Two people cannot be the shepherd in a home. That never works and wasn’t meant to. But two people can honor one another. One is honoring strength. The other is honoring weakness. But the honor is the same.

That gives you an idea of how “likewise” should be viewed here in Romans 6. We just learned that Jesus died a death to sin, but lives a life to God. We are not Jesus. Our death to sin will not mean the salvation of the world as His did. We will not go immediately to Heaven, as He did. But there is still a serious similarity that Paul wants us to pick up on. And the key to that similarity is the word in KJV and NKJV, “reckon.”

“...reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin...”

*Logidzomai*. Translated “reckon”, but that English word has become an expression used in the hill country. “I reckon I’ll be gettin’ to town now.”

There is a more dignified meaning of the word, but generally speaking we don't use it and therefore we lose a little of Paul's meaning. Let's get it back.

"Consider" is the more modern meaning of the word. But even that may not take you where Paul wants you to be. The word actually means to "take an inventory" or to "estimate." So you have the facts before you, you add them all up, and you make a conclusion based on the facts. This is not imagination or guesswork or just thinking something is true. That meaning is borne out in a verse we have already covered in Romans. Go to 3:28 again.

"Therefore we *conclude* – same word – that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." God's righteousness was revealed in Jesus. Jesus saves us freely by His grace. No works can save us. Therefore we *conclude*. We "reckon". We form an estimation based on the facts available.

Back to our verse. In a similar manner to the dying and living again of Jesus, you can make a conclusion. What's the conclusion? You're dead! The same thing he has been saying for many verses now. There is no new truth, no twisting or compromising of this fact. As far as sin is concerned, you died. When Christ came in and filled you with that joy and peace and love, you had a new life...

Dead. And the Textus Receptus has the little particle in there that almost amounts to an "amen." Dead indeed. In fact, dead. Yea verily, dead. Really dead.

"... but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let's not lose sight of this! We're not just dead. We're alive. To God, as Jesus was when he was raised up. But the only way this is possible is in Jesus. You didn't call yourself out of that tomb. You didn't raise yourself up. Your life to God is not about you, it's all about Him.

MacArthur brings in here the story of Lazarus, and it might be profitable for us. Lazarus was also raised from the dead, though not glorified like Jesus. You will remember that he was wrapped from head to foot in these strips of cloth that were used in the burial process. Jesus commanded the people there to unbind Lazarus. That's a possible picture of our resurrection, although Paul wants to compare us to Jesus, not Lazarus. But when we first come from the grave, spiritually, we need help from other believers to get unbound from the habits and issues that caused our death to begin with.

Lazarus was every bit alive again. As you are in Christ. But there are still some hindrances. Those hindrances in the new life cause many believers to think, a little later on after the conversion experience, that nothing has really happened, or that what has happened is that another nature has been added, but the old nature is still alive and well. That seems to be confirmed by the constant struggle, even now, with sin. The temptations. The failures.

Still the word comes, we are dead to sin. Alive to God. As unreal as that may sound. MacArthur quotes David Needham, as will I:

“What could be more frustrating than being a Christian who thinks himself primarily a self-centered sinner, yet whose purpose in life is to produce God-centered holiness?”

Am I just a sinner still, or a new man in Christ? I see what's going on in me and it's hard to accept Paul, but accept him we must.

One help in this regard is to know we have been chosen from the foundation of the world. We will address this very helpful teaching later in the book. The One Who began a good work in us is going to finish it. That's a promise. We cling to statements such as these and allow God to work His salvation in us while we work it out.

**6:12**

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body...”

Therefore, since we died to sin, since we were buried in baptism, since we have been raised with Christ, since we have been planted together with Him, since the old person has been crucified with Christ, since we are set free from sin, since death has no more dominion over us, therefore...

Do not let sin reign... You are dead to sin, but sin is still a possibility. The carnal habits and memories are still there. It is possible that you can reach back into that stinking tomb and call sin back into a leading factor in your life. The sin-controlled self is dead but sin is not dead. Sin has been defeated, it has no right to reign any more. But Paul will not rule out the possibility of it reigning anyway. A usurper. A rebel. Illegal. A misfit. But still it is there, ever waiting to be a part of the Christian’s life.

Notice that Satan is not mentioned here or in a similar passage in Peter. (1 Peter 2:11) “I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” You can rebuke the devil all day long, but until you sit on your own flesh you will not progress too far in holiness. Sin is inside your body, not somewhere in hell with the devil. This mortal body is corrupt since Eden. At one point your whole being was corrupted, under the reign of sin. But since Jesus died and then entered your life, that sin is a defeated foe looking for a way to be undefeated, and Paul says, don’t let it happen!

Perhaps we can imagine sin as a prisoner of war. At your conversion you arrested sin, locked it up, and said to your body, you must now obey me, not sin. But sin looks for that key to unlock his prison doors and defeat you. Don’t give it to him. Chapter 7 will go into this in great depth but the groundwork has been laid here.

“...that you should obey it in its lusts.”

The word lusts here in KJV and others is simply desires. Think of children and how they get spoiled. They want something and you immediately give it to them. That's considered bad parenting, unless that something is about their health and well-being.

We know instinctively that children need to be told "no" and "wait" and "you're not in charge here." Those same messages need to be communicated to the constant desires our body and mind are putting on us. We call this practice self-control. When we practice this fruit of the Holy Ghost we keep far from those habits that destroy us.

Just as parents need to master their children, Christians need to master their corrupt desires. Don't you feel embarrassed when you are around a parent whose child is forever making demands that the parent is always obeying. "Yes, dear, whatever you want dear. I live to make you happy, dear." Carnality in a Christian looks the same way. "Yes, body. You want more food, body? More sugar, body? More nicotine, body? More alcohol, body? More fun, more excitement? Whatever you want..."

The picture is even more graphic in verse 13:

### **6:13**

"And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin..."

Members? That's body-parts. Do you notice how much Paul talks about the body here? The body is the target of our enemy. It is the body we are to offer up as a living sacrifice. It is the body that Paul buffeted daily. Punished. Put under. Made his servant, instead of the other way around.

The members of the body. Hands that go where they should not in theft and murders. Eyes that see things they should not in adulterous desire. Eyes also that read filth from magazines and books and internet sites.

Feet that carry people to the gambling dens and the drinking dens swallowing the fires of hell.

You died. To sin. The old man is gone. Paul is addressing the new man and saying to him, don't take that body of yours and allow sin that still is alive in you, though you are dead to it, to reactivate its individual parts. Let the new you tell your body what's what. Don't turn control over to the sin that was sending you to hell.

"...but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead..."

You see again here he is not talking about the ultimate resurrection of our bodies at the last day. He is saying you are alive, resurrected from the dead, even now. Let the new man dictate.

"...and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Now those hands are used for writing checks to your church and missions. For lifting up praise to God. For working around the church and neighborhood and home, good works of love for others. Your eyes now read God's Word, and see good in others. Your eyes are lifted up to the harvest fields of earth, for which you pray. Your feet travel to the streets or the mission fields carrying good news to the lost. Your body and every part of it belongs to God now.

#### **6:14**

"For sin shall not have dominion over you..."

The reason you can do what Paul says to do in verses 12 and 13 is presented here in verse 14. Don't let sin be your master! Don't obey sin! Don't listen to those evil desires! Don't let your body parts be handed over as instruments of evil! Let your life be totally given to God! Why?

Easy: Sin has no power over you that you don't give it. Not allowed to say, The Devil made me do it! But also not allowed, My old flesh just made me do it! Sin is in me and I had to do it! True, sin is in you, false, you had to obey sin. Sin is not your master.

If we can just imagine a place where slavery is still practiced today. While that old master owns you, you must do what he says. But if you are bought from him or set free, he can't tell you what to do. But, many are the stories of slaves who were set free and still wanted to be in the bondage they were in before.

We hear of those set free from the jail house or the prison and don't know how to live outside those places. They even try to get arrested so they can have the structure they are used to. By the way parents, that can happen to your adult children if you don't set them free early enough. You don't want them depending on you forever. When you are gone, what will they do? Teach them now what to do by encouraging their liberty as soon as possible.

Sin was the master. You were set free from sin by a death to sin. But sin is still there. Not as master but as master tempter. Brain patterns. Habits. Lies that sound like truths. Be free.

"...for you are not under the law but under grace."

Were we talking about law? How did "law" get back into the discussion? That was back in 5:20. Sin was in the world from Adam. But the law entered and made sin multiply. Being told not to do something is just what our flesh needs to do that very thing. The sin principle inside of you is all bound up in the idea of law. Whether you know the law of Moses or have a law to yourself, it is law and the breaking of law called sin that is now in your past, says Paul.

You are no longer under that awful bondage. Come out and be free. God's grace now rules all through the gift Jesus gave, through the Spirit of grace

that meets your every need and that carefully writes the law of God on your new heart so that you want to do what you ought to do, totally unlike it was before. Remember chapter 3, apart from the law, God has found a way to make us righteous in Jesus Christ.

And right away that same protestor shows up in Paul's imaginary audience and he is crying out in the next verse:

**6:15**

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”

Remember he asked in verse 1, shall we sin so grace may abound? Wherever there is much sin there is much grace. So let's sin! Here the argument goes, since we are free from the law and God wants to cover up all our past, let's just live as the world does. Enjoy!

This terrible argument has followed the Christian church through all its history. MacArthur here inserts a detailed description of sin in all its ugliness. Let me summarize some of the things he brings out:

“Sin is devastating, debilitating, degenerating. It corrupted the entire creation which today groans and suffers the pains of childbirth... It is a defiling, a pollution of the soul. It is to the human soul what corrosion is to a precious metal or smog is to a beautiful sky. It is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras. A defilement of flesh and spirit. It is rebellious, trampling on God's Word. If sin had its way it would destroy God Himself. And did attempt the same at Calvary. Sin refuses to acknowledge God as Creator. Sin is incurable by man's efforts. It is overpowering. It dominates the mind the affections and the will. It brings Satanic control. It promises satisfaction but cannot deliver. It damns the unredeemed soul to hell. It is the terrible life-wrecking, soul-damning reality that resides and grows in every unredeemed heart as an incurable cancer.”



So much more could be said. Perhaps this is enough for you to appreciate the horror with which Paul addresses this criticism, this suggestion that maybe we should just go ahead and sin because God's grace has appeared to us.

"...Certainly not!"

There it is again. Let it not be! A thousand times no! Impossible idea. He enlarges on his answer in the next verse.

### **6:16**

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey..."

Paul has already introduced the slavery image in verse 9 when he speaks of death having dominion, and in verses 12 and 14 where he mentions sin reigning if we let it. Here he makes the picture more graphic.

Now when we think of slavery we think of captured Africans who were forced against their will to board a slave ship and come to our shores as the personal property of the slave owner. He is not talking of that sort of slavery, but the voluntary kind.

So follow that same bound slave to a plantation in the South, and we see years pass. These huge cotton farms had multiple slaves, and relationships, even marriages, formed. In some cases, one of the marriage partners was set free. But he didn't want to go free. Everything he knew was right there, including wife and children. So he volunteered to stay.

Biblically, a gentler version of slavery is discussed in Deuteronomy 15: 12-17. Jewish law stated that you could not keep a slave over six years. Now these slaves were often the conquered people of cursed nations. God's enemies. To survive and be a slave was considered a plus. Most of these idolatrous nations were killed. But even the curse would be lifted after

those six years of bondage. That is, if you wanted it to be lifted. But suppose you really loved your master? Suppose you had gotten accustomed to the house and the blessings and the religion of this man whom you served for six years? Law stated you could serve this man forever. And some did.

That's a positive thing. But coming back to Romans, we turn it into something very negative and tragic. Don't you know, Paul says to all of us, that the master you served before was going to destroy you forever? Yes, you've gotten used to him. You like the way he has prospered you materially. But haven't you been with him long enough to know that that man is heading for judgment and you with him? Don't you know that if you keep obeying him you will be lost forever? You don't have to follow sin. You don't have to obey sin any longer. You're free. The chains have been removed.

"... whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness."

So you are not your own master after all. You thought you were when living in the world. It is the philosophy of worldly people to this day. "I am the master of my fate" said the ill-fated poet. No, you have the choice between two masters.

Two masters. Not two separate natures being talked about here. Two masters. Sin, that still lurks in the background of your life waiting to take you over. Or righteousness, that whole program of works that God gives to His people when he writes God's law on their hearts. This is not the Moses style works, that enslaved you and was impossible for you, and which you thought and knew you could never keep. No, these are the result of your salvation, not the reason for it.

When you walk with God, the Spirit of God places before you and inside of you, great desires to do this and that. When you walk in those works, great peace fills your heart. And great joy. And He gets all the glory

because you know you would never have done those things on your own. Faith saves, or justifies. But faith without God's works attached is not saving faith at all.

Ephesians 2:10 says it best: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [not *by* good works], which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." If your life is filled with bad works you either were never saved, or you love that old master more than you do the new one! Paul is convinced that the audience he is addressing is not of this type at all,

6:17

"But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin..."

Not, Thank you for figuring this out. Thank you that you were smart enough to choose Jesus. Jesus says to us, you did not choose me, I chose you. Our gratitude is to Him.

Look at the history of this world and your own history. Generation after generation of poverty, war, famine, disease. Those who have somehow risen above all of this are also victims of sin's ravages. Pride and lust and greed. All of us one way or another, from deep inside of us and all around us, the bondage of sin is graphically real. You were slaves. From a child you were a slave to your own desires. You offered yourself as a slave to someone else to meet their desires. You worked all your life as a slave of a political system that only wanted your money after all. You became a slave to bad habits. To the entertainment industry. To the world of sports or fashion or food. Everything you loved turned into yet another bondage. You were on your way down and out and that master of all demonic masters, Satan himself, was ready to take you to your final prison, your eternal bondage,

"yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered."

Let's start with "delivered." We actually saw that word in 4:25. Jesus was "delivered up because of our offenses." He was surrendered, turned over to, entrusted to, transferred over to. KJV says something was delivered to the Romans. NKJV more accurately says the Romans were delivered to something.

The actual Greek reads, word for word, "You obeyed from the heart into which you were delivered a form of teaching." I personally like that the best, but no translation I found, goes that way. The something was delivered into the Romans' heart, and from that heart they obeyed heartily.

The NKJV would mean that the Romans obeyed something to which they had been entrusted, and they obeyed it from the heart.

The general message is there all three ways. So now the important thing is, what was it the Roman church obeyed to set them free from the bondage of sin? It was a "form" of "teaching."

"Form" is *tyros*. This was the mold into which you would pour melted metal, that would harden into a particular shape. Whatever this teaching was, it was standard for everyone. And it must remain standard for us today. We are to preach the standard message that they preached.

Acts 2 talks about the apostles' teaching. The early church continued in the teaching being circulated by the living apostles. We do the same today. The words of those living apostles were written down on scrolls and later on printed paper, and they have not changed over these years. The form is still in place. And God's true people still obey it from the heart.

That form of words begins with the Gospel. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 2, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified". Later he talks of feeding them with milk, of laying the

foundation of the Christian faith with Jesus and the Good News.” Later others would build.

We are not sure who laid the foundation in the Roman church. Paul comes in as a secondary teacher, watering the seed of others, planting new seed for some. But he rejoices here that the Romans gobbled it up. They loved it. They grabbed it. They could see Paul was talking freedom from their old bondage.

The Christian Church is built on Teaching. Unless you are taught you don't know about Jesus at all. Unless you are taught, you don't know how to be saved. Unless you are taught you don't know how to lead the Christian life. Teaching is doctrine and doctrine is vital. No doctrine, no church. Go into all the world and teach, said Jesus. No, you say, that is “make disciples”. What's a disciple? A learner, a student. What do learners or students learn? They learn teaching. What is teaching? Teaching is doctrine.

A certain Chinese man wrote a book called *Christ Versus Doctrine*. Form a relationship with Christ, says the book, and don't worry about doctrine. Doctrine only interferes. Oh really, which Christ? Who is He? What did He do? What does he want of me? And to answer any of those questions, one must teach and learn doctrine. There is no relationship with Christ without obedience to the great commission to teach.

The reason, says MacArthur, that anyone would downplay Christ's doctrine, is so that they can teach their own doctrine. But we thank God with the apostle Paul, that when you were a slave of sin, one day you heard the teachings of Jesus, you embraced them, you were freed from your old life...

### **6:18**

“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

I believe we can skip comment on this verse since its content was covered in verse 16, and is explained further in the next verse. A new master. Sin has no dominion. Righteousness, the very righteousness of Christ is now in charge, calling the shots.

### **6:19**

“I speak in human terms [after the manner of men, KJV. Humanly, Gk.] because of the weakness of your flesh...”

Paul recognizes here the limitations we have as human beings both to understand spiritual principles and to put them into practice. “I’m using this human illustration because if I told you the whole depth of the spiritual truth you wouldn’t get it. Slavery you understand. You’ve seen it all around you all your life. So I’m painting this picture for you to show you what is actually going on in the spirit world.”

And what is going on?

“...for just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness...

This takes us back to verse 13. He really wants them to get this idea down inside of them. You used to use the various parts of your bodies for various types of sins. Your whole being and each individual part thereof, was in bondage.

“...and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness...”

“Leading” and “more” have been added in the NKJV to clarify what Paul is saying. The Greek is simply, lawlessness, or iniquity, to lawlessness. You do bad things and those bad things lead to more bad things. Little sins lead to bigger sins. Start with a simple drug and the next thing you know you’re dying from a serious drug. A little flirtatious behavior in the office and the next thing you know your wife is suing you for divorce on the

basis of full-scale adultery. Steal a little time from your employer and the next thing you know you are stealing money from the bank.

There is no such thing as a little sin, looked at in that way. One thing leads to other things. David has his Bathsheba, then he must murder her husband. Absalom wants his father's acceptance as a non-repentant murderer, then he wants nothing less than the kingdom of his father. Adonijah simply wants his father's virgin, but Solomon knows that what he really wants is the Kingdom. Sin produces more sin and more sin and then death. That's the kind of life you were leading, says Paul. A little here and there leading to bigger and worse crimes. You were a prisoner all that time to your desires and were on your way to a life of addiction to yourself, the worst addiction of all.

MacArthur relates the story of famous writer Oscar Wilde, whose gay lifestyle along with other deviant behaviors were finally made public towards the end of his life. He said, "I forgot that what a man is in secret he will someday shout aloud from the housetop."

That's how it was with you. More and more evil producing more and more evil. You know how that works.

"...so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for (same preposition, "to" or "into") holiness."

The same construction is used in both parts of this sentence. You used your body for sin which lead you to more sin. Now use your body for righteousness which will lead you to holiness. You now can reverse the downward spiral. Every time you allow your body to be controlled by the new principle inside of you, the unexpected but clearly promised reward will be, more righteousness. This upward trend is what we call "sanctification." You just keep getting better and better before God, whereas before you were getting worse and worse!

Moses stands up for a couple of God's people as a young man in Egypt. God equips him to stand up for a whole nation later in his life. Abraham gives away his beloved son on an altar. God gives him the son back, and, incidentally, bestows on him the entire nation called Israel and the Messiah and the blessing of the whole world. Josiah simply reads the holy scroll of God's law and repents. His repentance eventually brings on Israel's last revival. Good things and good actions produce better things and better actions and eternal consequences. Let your body's members be used for God. He continues the analogy in verse 20:

**6:20**

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

Some of the people of the world will freely and happily tell you, Yeah, I was one of you when I was a kid. My parents dragged me to church, made me do what they thought was right. How awful those days were. Now I'm free. I'm not in bondage to any church or anyone else's system of right and wrong. I'm the master of my own fate now. Free as a bird. So don't try to entangle me in your religious mess. Those days are past. Then they take another puff, or another drink, or add up another column of ciphers at their desk, or watch another program or listen to another of the world's songs, and they truly believe they are free. Check back with them in a few years. Psalm 73 suddenly comes to life:

"Surely you have set them [the ungodly] in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!"

Life seems so good and free for the people of this world, some of them. They seem to prosper. Then suddenly the bottom falls out. Property lost. Debilitating illness. Some last until death with a charmed life. But death proves to be the most slippery place of all. A huge slide that takes one into the pit of hell fire.



Free from righteousness means bound forever to sin, death, and hell.

**6:21**

“What fruit did you have then...”

Fruit. A product. A result. A seed is planted, a plant grows, the fruit is produced, and people partake of it. Paul is not suggesting here that there is no fruit in an evil life. He is asking the Romans and us to identify that fruit. And if they can't identify it, he will identify it for them. There is a result for every seed planted. Something comes forth eventually. As a man sows he shall also reap. What happens when we sow to the flesh, says Paul? What fruit did you have? Maybe you don't know yet because the fruit has not manifested yet. But there is a fruit that will certainly come forth after a Christ-less life.

“...in the things of which you are now ashamed?”

It seemed so much fun at the time. Your body said do this, and the world told you, if it feels good, do this. So you did it. Then your body, to which you were a slave, told the real you inside, try this. And you tried this. It produced immediate happy results. But now you look back. Sorrow fills your heart. Oh that you could have those moments back. What was I thinking?! I am so ashamed now.

MacArthur quotes Calvin here: “As soon as the godly begin to be enlightened by the Spirit of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel, they freely acknowledge that the whole of their past life, which they lived without Christ, is worthy of condemnation. So far from trying to excuse it, they are in fact ashamed of themselves. Indeed, they go farther, and continually bear their disgrace in mind, so that the shame of it may make them more truly and willingly humble before God.”

There is a way that seems right to a man. Everyone else is doing it. It's fun. I have the money for it. I'm free. There's no reason not to do it. There is a way that seems right, but the end thereof are the ways of death... and that is what Paul says too:

"... for the end of those things is death."

There's the fruit. Death. Gradual, in stages, but very real. Adam and Eve saw the fruit. It looked good, it promised new realms of knowledge and wisdom, it was feely available to them, and oh, the taste turned out to be good too. Then bitter. Then evil. Then shameful. Where's some leaves? I've got to cover myself. I don't feel right. Where is God? I don't sense Him around us any longer.

Death had taken place. Slowly over hundreds of years the death that they already died began to wear out their bodies. And one day their bodies stopped working. And fell over. And decayed.

All sin ends in death. There is one final phase of death, and we don't know what happened to Adam and Eve, but there is an eternal separation from God. We will experience that physical death because of their sin. But because of Christ's intervention, we can be spared from that final death, that final separation. But for those who continue in Adam's disobedience, the fruit of their lives will be nothing but eternal death.

## **6:22**

"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God..."

But now... I like it when those two words appear in a text, and turn everything around. Romans 3:21, *but now* the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed. In spite of my sin, I can be saved. 1 Peter 2:10. Once you were not a people, *but now* you are the people of God. 1 Peter 2:25, You were like sheep going astray, *but now* you have returned to the

Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Colossians 1:26. This mystery was kept secret for centuries and generations past, *but now* it has been revealed to God's people. Ephesians 2:13. *But now* in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Ephesians 5:8. You were once darkness, *but now* you are light in the Lord.

Here: You were slaves *but now* you are set free. But you are still slaves. Slaves of God. In verse 18 he had said slaves of righteousness. But you see, they are the same thing. To be a slave of God means to be bound to do good righteous works the rest of your life. These works spring up from within the new heart and though they are done by your hands, God receives all the glory. As you look back on these things, you will feel no shame and remorse. You will in fact be amazed that God was able to do all that through you.

"...you have your fruit to holiness..."

See the comparison? In verse 21 the fruit of your old ways is death. That is all sin can produce. A dead-end street. But as God works His works through you, you are becoming more and more holy, more and more like the Jesus you see revealed in the pages of Scripture. One day you will be reading about the compassion of Jesus and you will say, I have experienced that compassion in me. You'll see Him separating Himself from the disciples for a night of prayer, and you'll realize you too had to do that once. So that is where that came from. You'll be angry at your own and others' hypocrisy and you will realize Jesus hated hypocrisy too.

Are you becoming more holy? Read the life of Jesus. Does your life in any way resemble His? God's aim is to make us like Jesus. 1 John 3:1-3, in part: "... the world does not know us, because it did not know Him... it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know... we shall be like Him... and everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure..."

More holy means, more like Jesus.

“... and the end, everlasting life.”

The final piece of the analogy. The old life would have ended up in eternal death. This way of holiness, under your new Master, God and His righteousness, leads you to life with Jesus forever. He repeats all of this in another analogy in the famous 6:23,

**6:23**

“For the wages of sin is death...”

Look at all the pictures Paul has drawn before us. In chapter 6 he pictures a death by crucifixion, like Christ’s, and burial in a watery tomb. He talks about your various body parts being offered to sin. He makes a big deal about the slavery picture. Now he uses yet another illustration, so that we can see exactly what sin is all about.

Sin earns a paycheck. People who have labored long in their rebellion against the holy God and His holy Son will get what they deserve. Justice will finally produce a wage that will last into eternity. God said to Adam that if he disobeyed, he would die. You and I are no exception. Disobedience, sin, brings forth a well-earned, a well-deserved payment of death. Separation from God forever.

“but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

On the other hand, there is an eternal condition some will experience that has nothing to do with deserving or earning or paying or wages. Unity with God forever is a gift. A gift is something you receive free. We hear a lot in our day about the gifts of the Spirit. One in particular. But we ought to be hearing, in Christian circles, about this gift. Eternity. The gifts we hear about are temporary. Some have already passed away. They played their role. But this gift of life is forever. Let’s talk about that. Let’s glory in that.

“In” is the corrected preposition after “eternal life.” It is true that our way to Heaven was and is through or by way of, Jesus Christ, as the KJV suggests. Now, if the Greek wanted to tell us “through” it would have used *dia*. But the Greek here is *en*. *En* is what you would suspect it to be: “in.” Jesus is not only the way to eternal life, He is the essence of eternal life. There is no eternal life outside of Jesus. “In Him was life,” says John, “and the life was the light of men.”

You won’t be in some way disconnected for eternity to wonder around the universe and create your own world and plan. Your eternal life is bound up in the person of Jesus Christ, whatever that means, and I think it means quite a bit.

Now don’t stop here... the chapter stops for some reason, but the thought does not stop. Let it flow to 7:1,

#### **7:1**

“Or do you not know, brothers,”

“Or” is a strange word to start a sentence with. It’s a conjunction, like “and”. It continues a thought from the last discussion. What were we talking about? Slavery. Dominion. Rightful ownership. Just deserts. Bondage. Freedom.

“...for I am speaking to those who know the law...”

Romans is addressed to saints in general, but there is no question he is addressing Jews very specifically from time to time in his letter. 2:17, “You are called a Jew, and rest in the law...” 2:23, “You who make your boast in the law...” 3:1, “What advantage then has the Jew...” 3:9, “Are we better than they...” 4:1, “Abraham our father...”

So it is here. A question directed at his Jewish audience:

“[Do you not know] that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?”

In the last chapter he spoke of sin’s dominion. In this new approach to the subject he speaks of the law’s dominion. It is interesting to note here, though, that the definite article is not used with the word “law.” This makes the passage refer not only to the law of Moses, but any man-made law too.

Do you not know, isn’t it common knowledge, that law has authority over a man only when he is living? Obvious. We don’t bring dead men into the courtroom, no matter how obviously guilty they were in life. Lee Harvey Oswald was the accused assassin of John Kennedy, but he was never brought to trial. He himself was assassinated shortly after the crime. He was gone. [Thanks to Macarthur for this illustration.] You don’t bring a corpse to trial. That’s the picture he wants to be before his readers as this discussion begins. Now an example, in case you didn’t catch his meaning:

## **7:2**

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.”

Some may want to use this passage to prove that remarriage is always wrong after divorce. And usually it is. But Jesus, and Paul also, each gave an exception to this rule. This passage should only be used to prove what Paul intended it to prove here: laws are binding on the living, not the dead. It’s an illustration, not a statement of Christian theology.

You will recall that Jesus excuses a partner from a marriage in which adultery has taken place. The death of the relationship, not the partner, is the cause of Jesus’ desire for the innocent partner to be free. And Paul realizes later in history that some unbelievers are going to leave Christian partners once they realize they have no unity with that partner any

longer. Let them go, says Paul. No bondage here. Remarriage is implied, though, it is true, not demanded, by these texts.

But in the case of the deceased partner, there is no Scriptural question about the freedom obtained. When the partner has left the planet, all vows are fulfilled, and the remaining partner is free to marry without any guilt attached.

It is strange to hear some hesitations that people have found or had bound upon them regarding the freedom of a widow. The Scripture here and elsewhere is plain. In fact, younger widows are practically commanded by the apostle to remarry. The biological factors alone are a good reason for the apostle's concerns in 1 Corinthians 7.

Paul adds in that passage that widows, especially the older ones, would not be amiss to stay single, so they can wait upon the Lord as did Paul, and serve Him more freely. But there is no compulsion either way.

The thought of verse 2 is concluded,

“But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.”

They both made a vow before the Lord. He kept his vow until the end. She can no longer keep a vow to one who is absent. She is free. Thus says common sense, and more importantly, thus says the law. But as we said, all of this talk of marriage law is only an example of the greater marriage and the greater death that takes place in the spirit realm when we come to Christ. First, another addition to the example before us.

### **7:3**

“So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress;”

The above exceptions aside, this is most certainly true, and rightfully. The great majority of divorce cases among us and in the world today are of this nature. Though, again, Romans 7 is not about Christians and marriage, it is speaking truth that needs to be addressed, especially to those contemplating divorce. The breaking of a vow given before God is a serious thing. Those who break promises to their spouses can also break other vows. Faithfulness to a partner is a test of faithfulness in other human relationships and in ministry.

The church through Christ's words and the Spirit's words through Paul has been generous in allowing some to divorce in impossible situations: adultery and abandonment of an unbeliever. But let not those who are simply fed up with their spouse, or had their feelings hurt, or were disillusioned or disappointed, or just ready for a change, let none of those people think that somehow God has changed His mind about this subject. Marriage is for keeps. It's for life. If you leave your spouse and break your promise you are an adulterer or adulteress. Sin can be confessed and forgiven but the consequences from Heaven will not be to your liking. What you thought was a freeing from an uncomfortable situation will turn into something even worse.

Dissatisfied husband, love your wife. Regardless. Depressed housewife, submit to your husband. No one is asking you to sin, but in every way possible, let him know you will serve him regardless of his idiocy at times. God will take care of the "undeserving" spouse, and in the process you will grow in Christ. If you run from a bad marriage, you'll run again and again all your life. Be an adult. Obey God. Don't allow your marriage to be another statistic.

"but if her husband dies, she is free from that law."

That's the same statement as in verse 2.

"... so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man."



Though the husband moves to the other side of the world, as long as he is alive you will be considered unfaithful. But the moment he dies, the rules change. You are free. Notice this passage assumes always that the man dies first. This whole scenario can work in the opposite way too, with the woman passing on, and the man free to remarry.

Now we move to the reason Paul is talking about marriage partners, and you see that it has nothing to do with matrimony, but is only a picture of the truth he has been working on since he brought up Adam and death to sin.

#### **7:4**

“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law...”

Therefore. That’s the word that makes us look back. It’s the end of a thought. The thought begins in verse 2. Since marriage partners are bound by law until one of them dies, since indeed a person who tries to have two marriage partners at the same time is considered adulterous, therefore...

You also have canceled out your last marriage partner, the Law. In this instance he speaks of the Law of Moses, to which his Jewish audience was married, in a very real sense. Here was a partner that, even though perfectly holy before God, turned out to be an abuser, a murderer. This partner was so exacting in his demands that eventually you could not live with him.

Now there is some confusion in the analogy. In verse two he talks of the physical death of the partner, leaving the survivor free to marry again. Here he seems to be talking about the death of the survivor, while the abusive partner lives on. On closer examination, the picture is a parallel to the slave-master analogy. In that illustration, the slave-master does not die, but the slave is freed to serve another Master, Christ. Here, the bad marriage partner does not die, but the victim, us, “dies” to the marriage,

turns around and marries again. Sounds like divorce and remarriage in one sense.

But in both analogies, and throughout the discussion, there is a real death that takes place in the slave or married person, and a new person emerges to do the serving and re-marrying.

Married to another is the same as serving the new Master. Your allegiance to the old is cut off. Enough is enough. You have bound me long enough. I am free. I am new. I am so free it is like I am dead to you. But because of Christ, “nevertheless I live”. “I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live... yet not I but Christ lives in me!”

Is it not true, as a further example of this, that when we were in the world we formed relationships that were evil? And when Christ came into the picture, suddenly those relationships meant nothing to us, and we scratched our heads and said, What was I thinking? How could I have joined my life to him? Similarly, in a much larger scale, the whole body of sin, call it slave-master or the exacting marriage partner, or just the whole body of sin, you died to it when Christ lived in you. New life. How did that happen?

“... through the body of Christ.”

Do you see how Paul makes the analogy work even better here? We were talking about marriage. One body married to another body. But that old body that you were died to that other body and you now start a new life married to the very body of Christ.

Or, one could look at this “body of Christ” reference as the sacrifice of Christ’s body on Calvary. It was through the death of that body on Calvary that you have been made alive.

“...that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead...”

You died to the law when Christ died on the cross. But when Christ was raised from the dead, you too were raised and your new life was united to His new life.

Do you see all the trouble Paul is going to here, to show believers that they have no business playing with sin? You died. You were freed from slavery. You were freed from a bad marriage by dying and being raised again. And what is all this about?

“...that we should bear fruit to God.”

And with those words we are back in chapter 6, verse 22: “... having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness.” This is the end product. This is what God is after. Not your happiness, though you will be very happy in eternity. Not your health and wealth, though there are blessings abundant in that land to which we go, and He has promised to meet our needs here. But our holiness. Our separation from this evil world, the sins of our flesh, the work of the Enemy. Are you becoming holy, and more holy every year? That means that you really died to the old master, the old marriage partner, and Christ’s life is having its effect in your life.

Short of holiness, you and I are deceiving ourselves. The fruit of living with Christ is a holy life. Verse 5 talks about that other fruit, which we were bearing in abundance before Jesus came in.

### **7:5**

“For when we were in the flesh...”

“In the flesh.” It’s just a little Greek word, *sarx*, but it can mean a lot of different things, in the Greek, and in English. Combining all these definitions you come up with “the soft and/or edible parts of the human body.” Or “The body minus bones and internal organs.” Or, “the physical

body as opposed to the soul and spirit and mind.” Or, “human nature.” Or, “a human being.” It’s translated “carnal” and just “flesh.”

When it’s translated “carnal” the translator has already interpreted the context of the word. Fallen human nature. When it’s translated “flesh” we are left to determine the context. It can be challenging.

We’ve actually seen this word five times already in Romans:

1:3. Jesus was of the seed of David according to the flesh. That is, Jesus was a human being descended from David. The context demands nothing sinful, only human. Remember that Adam was a fleshly human being before he sinned. Human ultimately does not mean sinful. But everyone since Adam has Adam’s fallen nature, except one.

2:28. Circumcision can be inward in the heart, or outward in the flesh. Again, no sin is implied by the word here. Just saying that it’s possible for the body to be affected without the heart being touched.

3:20. No flesh will be justified by keeping the law. Talking about humanity and it’s need for justification. Here is where sin seems to creep into the meaning of flesh.

4:1. What did Abraham find according to the flesh? The commentators suggest that “according to the flesh” goes with “our father” and simply means that Abraham is the human ancestor of the Jewish race.

6:19. Paul uses an illustration because of the “infirmity of your flesh.” Here Paul includes the mind in his speaking of human nature and says that they have trouble understanding things of the spirit in their fallen human condition.

So the context, not the word itself, must drive the meaning of words that are used so generally. What does Paul mean here when he speaks of “the

flesh”, and a time when the Romans were in that “flesh”? The context is clear as we move on...

“...the sinful passions which were aroused by the law...”

Is Paul accusing God here? Is he truly against Moses as the Jews were suggesting? How does he dare say that God’s holy law could arouse sinfulness inside of us?

He uses a word from which we get the word “pathos” in English. It is translated “motion” in the KJV, clearly an older English word which we would quickly change to “emotion” to be true to the Greek. More specifically, this word has to do with sad emotions, pain, suffering, as it is translated elsewhere. The NKJV has corrected it to “passion”.

Looked at from that perspective, this is a serious accusation indeed. The things inside of us that make us do what we do. The carnal instincts that make us perform acts which even moments later we realize are unholy and ungodly. But we do them anyway, and we are passionate about them.

All the desires of our flesh, of our eyes of our pride are included in this phrase, “sinful passions”, and the law of God started it all by arousing them. He will make clear in just a few verses that the Law is not sinful. I am. Or I was, in this context. All I could do was yield to my passions when God said to do the opposite, and I knew He said it, but I couldn’t help myself. I just yielded . To myself. My sinful self. The passions

“were at work in our members...”

You see the picture. On duty, day and night, these workers of iniquity, my passions. No breaks. Even in my dreams the desires that were against God continued. They were assigned to my hands and feet and eyes and ears, and they used them for their own purposes. Here is an idle hand. Passion says, use it to start a fight with someone. My feet are not involved in the rebellion, passion comes along and says, let’s go visit a place that is dark

and shielded from God, and let's sin there. You see it? Passion at work in our members. Like prison guards, keeping us bound and locked up and not allowing any part of us to be free from Satanic stronghold. A slave of the flesh. Married to sin and myself.

"... to bear fruit to death..."

Back to 6:21. What fruit did you have? The end of those things is death. He repeats himself here, but we need to hear it again. The wages of sin is death. Keep yielding to your passions. Keep following yourself. Stay in bondage to the old master. Love the pleasures of sin. You will die. You will be separated from God forever, consciously. That alone is torment. It is the greatest of all torments to lift up your eyes in hell and say as Jesus did, My God, why have you forsaken me?

The Father's answer to Jesus is, Because I love the world and I must accept your sacrifice. But your separation, Son, is only temporary. To us He will say, You rejected my sacrifice. You wanted your own way. You wanted to go it alone. Now you have the separation you always longed for.

**7:6**

"But now..."

There it is again! The game-changer. 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed..." 6:22, "But now having been set free from sin... you have your fruit to holiness..." And here,

"... we have been delivered from the law..."

Boom! He said it, Judaizers. He said it, Pharisees. You depend on the law? You want the law to be your guide? Not me! We have been delivered from the law. Not a new thought here really, but spoken in clarity that all of his readers had to catch. Dead to the law, verse 4. The law in its purity

and holiness was telling me to do things I could not do. My old nature was so perverse that if God said one thing, I wanted the other. I was spiraling down. But now I am delivered from all of that. I'm released from all that. Set free.

“...having died to what we were held by...”

Again, not new territory here, just a wrap-up of what he has been saying all along. The old master held us. We died to him, escaped his grasp, and now serve a new Master. The old marriage partner held us. We died to him, and are married to another, Jesus. But now he introduces a new thought...

“...so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit...”

Jesus did not set us free so that we don't have to serve any longer. We're not free from service to God. We've been given a new method, one which works and is pleasing to God. It's the newness of the Spirit. He'll talk a lot more about this and so, we will too. For now we go back to Jeremiah, and the promise God made through him, that in the latter days, God is going to write His law on our hearts. The law will not be a taskmaster to ensnare us. It won't be slavish obedience to a written code. Rather, that code will be lifted off the pages of Scripture and placed directly on our hearts.

We will desire to serve God. We will desire the various ways of serving God. Our hearts will be the instrument of service, as they are cleansed and equipped by the very Spirit of God. This was evidenced from the first outpouring of the Spirit. That Spirit fell on Peter and he wanted to preach. What he preached fell on his hearers and they wanted to be saved. No one had to force them to the waters of baptism. The moment they heard what God wanted, they did it. No one had to tell the disciples in that upper room to start praising God. They wanted to. The Spirit was in them, writing God's ways on their new nature, the one planted there by Jesus Himself as they were born again.

We must never forget that our way is a new way. It's not like the old way. When it starts looking like the old way, we need to repent and start over. What's the old way look like?

"... and not in the oldness of the letter..."

How does that work? You read the commandments. And don't be fooled: the New Testament books are filled with commandments. Without praying, without receiving from God, you open the Bible, you read it, you even agree with it, then you go out and disobey it because in your old carnal nature you can't do what God said to do. That's the old way. Reading, trying, condemned, failed.

Jesus delivered us from the old way. When He fills you with His Spirit, you read that same book, in the same passages, and they come alive in your spirit. Not only do you want to do them, but you are given the means to do them. The Word becomes flesh. The Scriptures are alive in you. You lead your daily life and you find you are actually doing the same things they did in the New Testament. You start looking like Jesus and acting like Him. That's the newness vs the oldness. The law on paper vs the law written on your heart. But now Paul has another question:

**7:7**

"What shall we say then?"

Watch out when Paul introduces a question. It is usually a criticism which someone else has made of his teaching. He puts the question out there, then devastates the inquirer with a solid logical Scriptural answer. He's saying, Should we agree with the people who have brought this idea to my attention? What's the truth here, as opposed to the lie I am about to share with you that I heard from someone in the room? How about it,

"Is the law sin?"



And then his constant reply to such foolishness,

“Let it not be!” [Greek]

Another ridiculous notion. But, in all fairness, Paul had just said in verse 5 that sinful passions in my heart were aroused by the law. That which arouses sin must itself be sin, the critics advanced. Not so fast, says Paul. I wasn't trying to say that that which came from God on Mt. Sinai through the great prophet Moses was somehow sinful. I'm just saying that because of who I am, this holy law became the instigator of sin. The revealer of sin.

You're cruising down the highway at 97 miles an hour. A friendly member of the legal team cruising in his own car at the speed limit, sees you, chases you, pulls you over, and issues you a reminder that that which you have been engaged in is not acceptable behavior. Alright, you get a ticket.

You weren't aware of anything bad. You were in a hurry and it was important to be where you were going on time. But the officer reminded you of what you were doing, gave your behavior a name and a penalty. Your bad behavior was exposed, brought to your attention by the standards of the law of the State of Illinois. See how Paul explains it: “On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.”

Let him explain himself through an example:

“For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ ”

We must remember here that all mankind is under the guilt of the law of God, even those who never heard Moses. We don't leave principles behind that we learned elsewhere to take in new principles. The law of Moses is the law of God, and that law is in everyone's conscience somewhere deep inside. Every time we sin against our conscience we sin against God and are guilty before him.

But Paul here speaks of the law as it has come down to us in written form, as it came down from the mountain in written form. Paul is saying here that there are rules that are not readily recognizable as God's laws. He didn't mention the more obvious things such as murder and adultery, but a more hidden one that most people break on a regular basis without knowing it consciously, covetousness.

Paul was cruising down the highway of life, desiring power and greatness, like his namesake the first king of Israel. He wasn't thinking "sin" until the Holy Spirit or a religious Jew, one of his teachers, pointed out to him the words of his own Torah, "You shall not covet." Desiring things that are not yours to have is a bad thing, Saul. Saul suddenly realized he had been sinning all along. He didn't know what coveting meant, but now he knew. God himself had written it in stone. God didn't make him covet, but God's law exposed his covetousness, as the next verse explains,

**7:8**

"But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment..."

Can you see, as I do, a man walking down the lonely road from Jerusalem to Jericho? Can you see a robber hiding behind the rocks there, ready to attack this traveler, steal his money, wound him, maybe kill him? Can you see the weapon in his hand? The law of God is the weapon that sin, the robber, uses to defeat the traveler, who is you. There's nothing bad about that weapon. There is something very bad about that sin that uses the weapon against us.

Sin cannot operate in its full ugliness unless it has a commandment of God to break, for that is what sin is, the breaking of the commandments of God.

"... produced in me all manner of evil desire."

That's the NKJV. The Greek simply reads "all desire." God said, Don't covet. Paul said, Now I covet everything. Sin produced a cacophony of desires every one of which I had to have, and the sooner the better, simply using the law of God that said the opposite.

Have you listened to the news? Everything is backwards. "Thou shalt not kill" has become, Kill all those who are inconvenient to us. The unborn or just born or deformed or old or Jews. And we justify every movement toward a murderous society. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" has become, Be unfaithful to your partner, cohabit with anything and anyone, whether the same sex, or an animal or a robot or a child. Men keep inventing ways to break God's law. But the law remains pure and holy, a silent exposé of the hearts of men.

Paul's example of covetousness has turned into an unprecedented lust for more and more gadgets and devices and homes and vehicles and property and there is no end in sight. Your children and grandchildren sit every day listening to greedy demon-filled advertisers enticing them to buy this and that, and you as a victimized parent yield to their every whim. I say, Shame, on a covetous nation that has rightly earned a bad reputation as greedy and selfish, far overpowering the reputation it once had as a nation of givers and sharers.

What did all this? Paul says, the law of God did all this. What? Yes, the law was used by our sinful nature to show just who we are, and just what sin is. You will notice as we progress through this passage that Paul uses sin as the culprit. But sin is a part of the human condition. How does one separate sin from the sinner? Paul could not do that. We can blame sin all our lives, but in fact if we yield to that master within us, we will be judged, along with sin. If sin is the culprit, stop serving sin!

"For apart from the law sin was dead."

He is telling the Romans here what he already told them in different contexts. Look again at 3:20: "... by the law is the knowledge of sin." And

4:15, "... the law brings about wrath, for where there is no law there is no transgression." And 5:13, "Sin is not imputed where there is no law."

Apart from the law, no sin. MacArthur quotes Charles Hodge here:

"The law, although it cannot secure either the justification or sanctification of men, performs an essential part in the economy of salvation. It enlightens conscience and secures its verdict against a multitude of evils, which we should not otherwise have recognized as sins. It arouses sin, increasing its power, and making it, both in itself and in our consciousness, exceedingly sinful. It therefore produces that state of mind which is a necessary preparation for the reception of the gospel... Conviction of sin, that is, an adequate knowledge of its nature, and a sense of its power over us, is an indispensable part of evangelical religion. Before the gospel can be embraced as a means of deliverance from sin, we must feel we are involved in corruption and misery." From Hodge's commentary on Romans.

So the pattern is established here. Sin takes the law and produces sinfulness in us. Listen to Paul's testimony of how it was with him before Christ. Notice carefully that in this part of the chapter everything is in the past tense. Let's leave it there. This is not Paul the Christian, not yet. This is Paul the unbeliever.

Notice also the change in his usage of death. Earlier in the book he is saying we must die to sin. In this passage he is saying that sin killed him. It's a different illustration. Put Romans 6 on hold for a while.

## **7:9**

"I was alive once without the law..."

Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, raised in an upstanding Jewish home, given to Gamaliel for teaching, memorizing Torah, going to Hebrew school. When was Paul without the law? He knew the law, and became

an expert in the law. Philippians 3:6 confirms that this man was blameless regarding the righteousness of the law. No one could say a word against this man's life. A good Jewish boy. A good Jewish man. On his way to stardom in the Jewish community. "Without the law"?

We're not aware of how and when it started to happen, but somewhere along the line the Shepherd's rod began to nudge him. It happens with all of God's chosen. For the longest time conviction doesn't touch you. You are rising up without God. Oh sure you believe in Him, but you don't really need Him.

All that you've been doing you have done without Him. You are immersed in religious knowledge and activity, too busy to hear the One that it is all about. Alive in your sin but totally ignorant of it. Aware of the law of God but totally, as Paul, without it. You could be the antichrist and would not know it. The lawless one. Rules are for everyone else, but "I'm good". As they say on the street. And they mean it. I don't need what you are selling. I'm good, satisfied, alive, happy.

Such was Saul of the city of Tarsus. Alive and well, thank you. But then...

"... but when the commandment came..."

Since he is only talking of one commandment, we assume he means the same one he has been talking about. One day he heard, and really heard, "You will not desire things that you should not desire." He heard it deep inside. Oh my! I break that commandment every day. Why didn't I see that before? I am a law-breaker. I with all my gifts and background and training and family, I the great Saul. A sinner. The very thought killed him!

"...sin revived and I died."

We see the word "revive" in the standard texts and wonder, Where does it say that sin ever died to begin with? Something has to die before it can "revive", at least in our thinking. Sure enough, the Greek behind it means

to “recover life.” It is used in this same book to speak of Jesus’ dying, rising, and living again.

So when was sin dead in Paul’s life? At the beginning of the verse. “I was alive...” He means he was alive in his flesh without knowledge of sin. Sin was figuratively “dead” to him at that point. It was really just sleeping. It needed a nudge to be activated. And the commandment gave sin the nudge it needed. The law. I was just breezin’ along with the breeze thinking all was well, living my life, when suddenly I heard God speak His word to me, sin woke up, and I went down. All my life I lifted up the law of God to others, but I suddenly saw something about that law that shook me to my foundations...

### **7:10**

“And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.”

A lot of different translations here. The Greek order goes like this: “And was found to me the commandment which to life, this to death.”

I made an awful discovery. I had been taught all my life that God’s Word was a good thing, a true thing, the very light of life. The law is righteous. The law is my meditation, it makes me wise. And did not Moses say (Deuteronomy 30:15-18) that if we would keep God’s commandments we would live, and that if we did not we would perish?

The commandment was to give life. But it brought me death. Yes, and now that I think about it, it brought death to my people also. They did not keep God’s laws, and the nation of Israel disappeared through its evil ways. All the majesty and trembling of the Mt. Sinai experience, where did it lead? Death. The law was holy, but its very holiness separated me from God. And that is death.

What a disappointment. To give one’s self to a principal, a way of life, from childhood, only to find you’ve been on the wrong track all along.

Those who today are trusting in their own goodness to save them are on that same track, and it ends nowhere. What a huge disappointment it will be on the day of judgment, when people who tried their best, but without any reference to God or God's Son or God's perfect sacrifice, arrive and are told, depart from Me, I never knew you.

A pat on the back from a friend, Hey you did your best, that's all God expects, won't work at that moment. A certificate from Alcoholics Anonymous or a diploma from the finest university or an IRA set aside diligently by a caring parent, none of that will earn one the right to bypass God's only way of salvation.

Holding up a high standard, even God's high standard, the law of Moses, won't work,

### **7:11**

"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."

This is the same information as in verse 9, with the addition of the words "deceived me." With that word we go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. No need for Moses here. Only one commandment. Don't eat that fruit. That's it. No tablet of stone needed. It was clear enough. No need for Hebrew school to memorize the whole Torah. God's law clear and simple.

Then along comes sin, in the person of the sinner of all sinners, the rebel, not from hell, but originally from heaven, going to the lake of fire, but he surely is not there now. (Where did we get the idea that the devil is in hell? Our lives would be so much simpler if he were!)

Sin comes to Eve, taking occasion by the commandment. You see there had to be a law in place in order for Satan to cause man to sin. Something to break. Satan has nothing to offer of his own. He only can pervert and

distract from what is already out there. He asks Eve to recite the very law she is about to break, so it will be clear in heaven and earth that she knew what she was doing.

Sin knows the law then believes the lie. Sin asks the question of the law, gets all around the law, before it breaks it. But it starts with the law. That's the pattern Paul is showing us. A law, holy and pure, comes from God. Sin arises to fight that law any way possible. The law itself in the garden was a good one. God did not want his creations to be bothered with evil. Knowing about evil is not a good thing. It was a good law. So, don't partake of the fruit. Sin/Satan comes along and says the rule is not good. That the Rule-Giver is not good. That life would be better, even best, by breaking the law. And we believe sin. And we die inside.

The law cannot save. We learn that, not by going all the way to Exodus 20. We learn it in Genesis 3. The law can only condemn me to hell, because of sin that will forever come against that law, not because there is something in the law itself that is bad.

#### **7:12**

"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."

The flow of the text should probably make this sentence the beginning of a new thought started with the word "So" instead of "therefore" as you see in the ESV. It's like a summary of what has been said so far, So the law is holy, then he goes on to restate the question he has already asked.

Let's don't forget just how holy is this law. Look at the attention God drew to it when it was first given. Lightnings and thunder, a Voice from Heaven, tablets of stone written by the very finger of God. A law so holy that the box containing it, called the ark, could not be touched without dire consequences. A law, the breaking of which meant severe penalties,



including death, and ultimately, with no blood intervening, eternal death. What God says, is holy!

And not just the law as a whole, but each commandment is just as holy as the whole set of commandments. To dishonor your father or mother is just as much a sin as killing someone. Desiring your neighbor's property is just as bad as worshipping the wrong god! It's all holy because it comes from the mouth of God. Not only holy, says Paul, but just. No one dares to say about God's law, "That's not fair." Not if he values his life! A man given to lusting after women might be tempted to say, "How can I ever be faithful to one woman?" I cannot keep that commandment, it's just too hard. It's not fair to ask me to do something I cannot do." "I was born that way", is the new justification for sexual perversion of all kind. That is just another way of saying to God, Your law is not just. It is not fair!

May God have mercy on a man who cheapens the law of God by talking like that. And, good news, God has had mercy on such a man. In Christ, sin is forgiven, and a Spirit is offered to give power over any sin.

Paul adds here that the law of God is good. It's good for you. Like eating those vegetables, it can be hard and distasteful to your old self, but when God comes in and lives His life in you, you will find that keeping God's law is healthy, wise, pleasant. You'll be able to say with the Psalmist, Oh how I love your law, it is my meditation all the day! God's people love God's ways. All of them. Because they have the means to be obedient now.

He now asks a question similar to the one in verse 7 where he said: Is the law sin?

### **7:13**

"Has then what is good become death to me?"

He has established that the law is good. Could something that is good, in and of itself be also something that produces death? His answer is familiar,

“Certainly not!” [Let it not be!]

“But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good...”

Straightforward statement. And repetitious. See verse 8: “Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced... evil desire.” And verse 11, “Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me...”

Sin is the culprit, not the law. But, sin could not be identified as sin unless it had this means by which to operate. No law = no sin. When you go to court, having murdered someone, you will be sentenced because you broke the law. Murder is against the law of God. That’s what makes it sinful. Taking another life? In war, Israel was blessed in doing that. Whole nations were obliterated. When Jesus comes, that will happen again. Murder is the breaking of the commandment, and when you murder, it is because sin has caused you to elevate yourself against God’s very words. Sin has condemned you, but it used the law to do it.

But when all is said and done, sin is exposed here. The law retains its holy character because it comes from a holy God. Sin shows itself to be what it is, because it comes from a sinful nature.

“so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.”

Not only is sin exposed for what it is, but what it is, is defined for us. We all must agree that sin is behind our rebellion. But do we understand how utterly sinful is this disease we have? God stands before us and says, Do not do this. We stand before God and say, Forget you. I will do as I please. That’s sin. God the Creator says, I made you. I have the right to order your life. I know what is best for you. We say, I don’t need your ways. I know how to live. It’s pretty obvious. And if it feels good, I’m going to do it. Now step aside, God. Sin is exceedingly sinful.

We all probably know that sin comes from a word that means to “miss the mark” as in target practice. See what Paul is suggesting here. “Missing the mark” is exposed in our rebelling as *exceedingly* “missing the mark.” We like to think that we are close to perfect. Just missed the mark a little bit. No, when you defy the Word of the living God, you miss the mark big time. You miss the bulls eye, the outer rings, the whole target, the trees in the background, the whole landscape, and your arrow gets lost out in the lake somewhere. We’re not even close! Exceedingly sinful. Rebellion is an awful thing.

We get to practice obedience and hitting the mark at home and in the church and in our jobs. We are given parents and pastors and employers who expect obedience to the things we say. We can see just how far we have missed the mark in Heaven by looking at our hearts when we shoot an arrow at home. Obedience starts at your home address.

So far in the text, Paul has been talking about sin in general, and sin in his past life, or in all of our past lives. In the next verse, Paul switches to the first person exclusively, and he talks about the present. He will now offer his own present life as an example of how awful sin is. And we have learned, remember, that a death took place. That death was to be me. But sin is still alive. The master was not killed, he was disowned, but is trying to get what he thinks is his property back. That’s what the rest of chapter 7 is all about.

Let me conclude this portion of the chapter with a poem MacArthur uses in his book, written by Robert Murray McCheyne, a minister of the 19th century who lived only thirty years, but left us a treasure in his writings. Let’s cement this portion of the chapter with thanksgiving for what Jesus did for us at His death, and at His calling us to salvation. Then we’ll pick up the story of sanctification and the struggle toward it, in the rest of the chapter.

You may recall that Jehovah Tsidkenu means in Hebrew, “The Lord our righteousness.” Here is McCheyne’s testimony in poem about that Lord:

“I once was a stranger to grace and to God, I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;  
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree, Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.

“I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage, Isaiah’s wild measure and John’s simple page:  
But even when they picture the blood-sprinkled tree, Jehovah Tsidkenu seemed nothing to me.

“Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll, I wept when the waters went over His soul,  
Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree Jehovah Tsidkenu-  
‘twas nothing to me.

“When free grace awoke me by light from on high, then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die;  
No refuge, no safety in self could I see – Jehovah Tsidkenu my Savior must be.

“My terrors all vanished before the sweet name; my guilty fear banished, with boldness I came  
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free – Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.

“Jehovah Tsidkenu! My treasure and boast, Jehovah Tsidkenu! I ne’er can be lost;  
In Thee shall I conquer by flood and by field – my cable, my anchor, my breastplate and shield!

“Even treading the valley, the shadow of death, this “watchword” shall rally my faltering breath;  
For while from life’s fever my God sets me free, Jehovah Tsidkenu my death-song shall be.”

McCheyne, and the apostle, knew what it meant to come into contact with the saving blood of Jesus and have all past sins forgiven, covered, done with. That battle was won. I trust everyone listening has fought and won that battle with Jesus. A death to sin and a new life in Christ.

But wait. There’s more. The Christian life does not end at the waters of baptism, or the prayer of salvation. Read on.

### **7:14**

“For we know that the law is spiritual...”

A new word here, but not a new concept. He has just called the law “holy.” It is sinless. Originally made to bring life. Just. Good. Now, “spiritual.” From the adjective form of pneuma.

The word used in your New Testament to refer to the Holy Spirit, evil spirits, or the human spirit. It means “breath” or “air”. We get the word “pneumatic” as in the drill that is air-powered. It’s a neutral word, like religion. You have to decide what it means from the context. Here it is used as an opposite of carnal or fleshly, so it means the invisible world, probably God Himself. A law which is so holy obviously comes from God. The Words of God originally come from the Spirit world, not from inside of us.

So this statement about the law is just one more way of affirming that even though sin uses the law, the law itself is not to blame for my evil conduct. He goes on to place the blame where it belongs:

“but I am carnal.”

The original carnal Christian. Paul is a Christian. And here he says he is (not was) carnal. Fleshly. Living according to the flesh. Yes, there is such a thing as a carnal Christian, but not defined like you've heard that expression explained in the church today. In fact, everyone is a carnal Christian by the definition Paul will give it. This is present tense. This is not Paul's life before Christ. This is Paul's life and Peter's life and your life and my life, right now. And anyone who says he does not struggle as Paul will describe in detail here is either lying or has not been born again. You can't have the Spirit mixed in with a fleshly body and have absolutely no struggle. But let Paul tell it.

"sold under sin."

What in the world do those three words mean? We have read over them so many times we assume we know what they mean. KJV and NKJV based on the Textus Receptus both have that translation. So go to the other leading Greek manuscript and see if the Greek words are any different. Not at all! But the modern translations change it anyway because the words don't seem to make sense. The NASB has it, "sold into bondage to sin." The New American Bible says, "sold into slavery to sin." Everyone's favorite NIV, "sold as a slave to sin." And the New RSV, sold into slavery under sin. That one at least keeps the word "under" in the text, but it still doesn't seem to fit.

Do we need to add words to the text to explain it? Probably safest not to do that, but the original three words are still there, begging for an understanding.

"Sold" is really "having been sold" in the Greek. That helps a little. But when was there a time when there was some sort of sale, some transaction that traded one commodity for another, that Paul could be talking about? I believe he is talking about the transaction we all know about, recorded in Genesis 3. Adam. What commodity did he have? Much. Relationship with God. Sinlessness. Authority. Peace. But Adam

was made an offer. Believe me, do what I suggest, give your will to me. Adam and Eve turned over their allegiance to Satan, rebelling against God, and Satan gave them their wages, death. No more relationship with God, no more sinlessness. Adam and Eve sold out.

The results of that transaction have followed the human race to this day and included Paul. I have a flesh-controlled nature, having been sold...

“Under.” Perhaps it will help us to use the word “underneath.” It literally means a place that is inferior. Sin is on top of me, dominating me, my master. That is why the translators felt free to use the words slavery and bondage. On that day in the Garden millennia ago, I was sold into a position of subservience to sin. From a position of knowing only good, humanity now knows good and evil and refuses to choose the good consistently.

Present tense, says Paul. I am carnal, I do have a fleshly nature still. Because in the past I was sold out to the devil and sin. He goes on now to describe the struggle that ensues from this old nature being side by side with a new nature. Remember here that it is not some unusually wicked saint we are talking about. Immature or fleshly believers, new-borns, or unbelievers, know little of this struggle, if anything. It is the maturing and mature that realize finally that there is a fight going on and they must participate in it.

This is the great apostle, the one we have put on a pedestal as practically sinless. And well we should think of him as ahead of us, but look what that means and what it will mean for you when you finally get there:

### **7:15**

“For what I am doing, I do not understand...”

Humanly speaking, says Paul, it doesn't make any sense. Here I am all my life loving God's law, loving God. Now I know Jesus personally, walk with

Him, serve Him. He blesses me with everything, I just don't get it why I still behave so poorly at times...

"For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."

You say, that is Paul before Christ. Really, is there a Christian listening who has not felt this very same thing? Again, I can make exception for the new believer. He's on his honeymoon. All is sweetness and light. And that is fine! That's how young love is supposed to be. But mature love starts to experience deficiencies, starts to realize that all is not well inside. Dead to sin, hate sin, but sin did not die when I did. Sin is still out there trying to draw me back.

The maturing saint is forever making promises. Forever seeing good things in the law of God and saying, Yes, I will do that. That is good. That is desirable! How many church services, where the preaching is what it ought to be, are filled with saints falling in love again with the beautiful words and ways of God. And they go out just knowing that life is going to be different now. But it doesn't always happen.

And how many Christians flip through that newspaper or channel selector and see the evils of this world and say, oh how despicable, how awful, then go out and do some of the same things themselves? How can this be!?

#### **7:16**

"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good."

Remember we are still in the present tense with Paul. I, the new man in Christ, do what I, the new man in Christ, don't want to do (sound familiar?), I'm on the law's side, I have to agree that it is a good thing. I didn't always agree with the law. I didn't always see things this way. Before Christ I saw the law as my enemy and it was, constantly condemning me. But now I see the law is good. I, the new man.



7:17

“But now, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

Now he has just said in verse 16 that he does what he doesn't want to do. Now he is explaining the process. I do it, but it is not me doing it. Confusing? Let me add to the confusion with his words in Galatians 2:20,

“I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.” I have used the Greek text here, not any of the translations, as there is some confusion there. Listen to what he is saying.

First he says, I sin. But it's not me. It's sin in me. Then he says. I live. But it's not me. It's Jesus in me. Where is Paul? He doesn't sin, he doesn't live. Where is he and what is he doing? Where is Paul hiding?

Let's put both together. When Jesus was crucified, Paul was crucified with Him, as were we all. We all died to that old person, the body controlled by sin. We were slaves to the law, to the old marriage partner, to the slave master. We separated ourselves from all our past. Through the Spirit of God a new life was formed inside of us. Yes, we preach, but it is Christ preaching. We pray, but it is Christ in us. We love with the love of Jesus. We are patient because He gives us patience. It is our body in use here, but it is a body that has died to the old way and allowed the new way in. If we sin with that body it is because we temporarily allow that old master to revive the sin that is still in us.

I, the new I in Christ, cannot sin, because Christ cannot sin. But I, the new man, can flirt with the old master from time to time and do things we hate, things we are really dead to. I, the new I, is a new man altogether because Christ has given it life. We take all blame for leaving that Christ to go back into things we ought now, but we take no credit when Christ makes us do new things. In those senses, it is sin that is responsible for my sinning, and Christ is who is responsible for my holy living.

Let's read verses 15-17 again, in that light.

**7:18**

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;”

See what he is doing? It's the personal pronoun that mixes us up. When he says “I” or “me”, does he mean the new I or the old I? He's been using “I” for the new I until now, but he changes it, and lets us know he is changing it, here, so we won't be confused. In “me”, not that new me that is in Christ, but the old me, my human nature by itself.

I heard recently, in a church setting, that since we were created in the image of God, we all have value and worth and intrinsic dignity. It's a message you'd expect to hear in the world, but not in the church. The church, through Paul, must teach the utter depravity of man, and have only compassion, not praise, for humanity. Humanity is fallen and is headed for a Christ-less eternity, and only by the grace of God in His people can the image of God, the image of Christ be restored to humans. That is in fact what God is doing. He has begun that work in us already. He will finish it.

But Paul was not finished yet. He looked at his self, even as a born-again Christian, and said, my flesh is corrupt as ever before. This human body with its bent toward sin, must be controlled for now. It will never be reformed. It will in fact die and turn to dust. Only the new man inside of me will live forever, clothed one day in a brand new body.

Listen to him again. Nothing good dwells inside this human nature of mine. Nothing. Let's not compromise this truth. If there is something good in you, offer it to God and see if it is accepted.

“But I'm a nice person, everyone knows that.” Why are you nice? And are you nice all the time, or just when it is easy to be nice? Every good quality

you think you have needs to be put on the witness stand and questioned like this. And every time you do it, you will agree with Paul, No, there is nothing good in me. I never learned love until Jesus came along. I never learned sacrifice, kindness, compassion, patience, until Jesus started doing these things in me. I have nothing to boast of. Jesus is everything. I, in my flesh, am nothing.

“for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find.”

I have inside of me a desire to do God’s will. He will expand on that later. If you do have that will to do good, where did that come from? Not you. The law of God is in there somewhere. The Spirit of God, now that you are a believer, is in there a lot. But when you go trying to do what you know you ought to do, without prayer and asking His help, you can’t do it. Don’t have the wherefore, don’t have the power. In myself.

### **7:19**

“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

Takes us back to verse 15, where he says the same thing. Don’t want to belabor the point here. But if there is still someone in the listening audience who wants to say that Paul is talking about his life before Christ came in, let him or her be the first to stand and tell us that he or she has never experienced anything like this since you became a Christian. That is, you never, since that wonderful day of your conversion, never ever wanted to perform a holy act but had not the power to do it. Never ever did a bad thing that you promised God you would never do again. If no one of us can say that, why can’t we see that Paul too struggled in his Christian experience?

In verse 20 he repeats verses 16 and 17:

## 7:20

“Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

Wading through this passage seems difficult because of this repetition. Paul really wants to make this point! What point? The same as he has been making all along. You died to sin, but sin didn't die. You are divorced from sin and the law that aroused it, but your partner wants you back. The bondage of that old slave-master is broken, but the old boss has his eye on you and would love to have you serve him again.

For those who thought everything was finished at the time Christ came in he makes it clear that there is to be a battle. Sinful desire will continue to aggravate you, entice you. You do not have to listen like you did before. Before there was only one choice. Sin spoke, you answered. Now sin is speaking from the outside of the new man that you are in Christ. You can still hear that voice but you have a greater Voice within you.

You see, it is not just the devil wandering around the earth. The enemy is within yourself. The devil may send persecutors and try to destroy you from the outside, but it is the enemy within that is your daily concern. In fact, it is a “law” of a different sort that is in you now. He goes on to explain this new “law” or principle that you as a serious believer need to be aware of. These are the rules. Listen carefully when the Holy Spirit offers these secrets to you...

## 7:21

“I find then a law...”

We need to stop here a while. That word “law” keeps popping up in so many different contexts.

7:1-2, law in general. *Nomos*. Laws governing marriage in every land.

7:4. The law. God's law. The law of Moses. *Nomos*. We are dead to that law.

7:5. Passions within us are aroused by the law. *Nomos*.

7:6. Delivered from the law. Same word.

7:7. Is the law sin? No. We know sin by the law. *Nomos*.

7:8. Apart from the law, sin is dead.

7:9. Alive until the law came. Alive in a fleshly way.

7:12. Law is holy. Nothing wrong with the law. *Nomos*.

7:14. The law is spiritual, from God. *Nomos*.

7:16. I, the new "I" am in agreement with the law, as was David in the Psalms. It's good. Even when I disobey it. Sin gets hold of me now and then. In fact,

7:21. I find a law inside of me that is different than God's law. He will say it again in verse 23. Two laws clashing with one another, bumping heads, as it were. Same Greek word. Which caused the translators rightly to use the same English word. Later translators thought that, for clarity, they should insert the word "principle." But "law" is probably better. Law vs law. God vs me.

So what is this other law? He will say it twice. Here,

"... that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good."

Write it down. This is New Covenant teaching. This is exposing secrets about humanity that had lain dormant for so long. There is another law that opposes Moses. It's inside of you. It won't be gone until Jesus comes.

Yes, yes, you were made in the image of God. But that image was blotted out by sin. Imagine a portrait of your grandmother. Some street kid comes into your house with a bucket of mud and pours it over your grandmother's picture. I see little bits of her face and dress but the picture is ruined.

It is a thing of dishonor and disgust as we are, in our flesh. In my flesh is no good thing? True, and here is the corollary to Paul's earlier proposition: evil is present with me.

Put those two ideas together and you will have placed within you a longing for that image of God to be restored. Preview of Romans 8, in verse 29, Paul says there is a group of people in the world that are going to be conformed to what? The image of His Son! It's coming. It's happening. In Heaven it is completed. A man made in God's own image, lost by Adam, regained by Christ and a host of disciples filled with the very Spirit of Christ!

So now you have the rest of the story. There is the law of God, and the law of Bob. Regardless of how good God's law is to me. Regardless of the fact that I truly want to do His will, there's old Bob and his law, a law called sin.

The KJV preserves better the order of the Greek words here, when it says, "When I would, or want to, do good, evil is present with me." Almost a pathos there. Can you feel it. "I really want to do good. God lives in me putting those desires there. I never had this before. I wanted to do bad. I was totally against God's law and ways and lived for myself. But now I really desire God and His practices. But that other law keeps fighting me."

A little repetition in verse 22:

### **7:22**

"For I delight in the law of God..."

Of course a man of God delights in God's law. David was such a man. Psalm 119 is full of this delight:

v. 16, "I will delight myself in Thy statutes."

v. 24, "Thy testimonies also are my delight."

v. 35, "I delight in Thy commandments."

v. 70. "I delight in Thy law."

v. 174. "Thy law is my delight."

"...according to the inward man."

The redeemed Paul. The man that Paul said in Corinthians is being renewed day by day. The man that Paul says is to be strengthened with power through the Spirit of God. It's the inner man that is on its way to Heaven, to be joined later with a renewed resurrected body. But for now that inner man that loves God's law is combined in the same person with a body that leads to death, and follows that other law, that he talks about again in the next verse.

### **7:23**

"But I see another law in my members..."

This is the "law" or "principle" that he just mentioned in verse 21, "I find then, a law, that evil is present with me..."

It's in my "members". That takes us back to verse 13 of chapter 6, "Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin..." and verse 19 of that chapter, "... just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness... now present your members as slaves of righteousness..." The law is in my "members", the various parts of my body that I allow to be used by sin.

I allow eyes to view unholy things. I allow ears to hear the garbage on the media. I allow feet to run with the wicked people of earth. Our body parts can be offered to the enemy. The body, with its master, makes a very bad task master, but God wants us to make it our servant.

"warring against the law of my mind..."

A new word is introduced here. "Mind" has not been used since chapter 1, when Paul is talking about the reprobate mind, the mind of man as it is seen in the unsaved. Here Paul is obviously not talking about a reprobate mind, because he is speaking of the opposite of the law of sin. But it is yet another usage of "law." We have the law of Moses which is the law of God. We have common law in every culture. We have the law of sin. And now the law of the mind when it has been renewed by God. That law states that when God Himself writes His law on your heart, it begins to send forth signals to the real you about what is holy and just and good, and your renewed spirit likes that and wants that. The reprobate mind only wants the things of the fallen fleshly nature.

Think of what your overwhelming desires were before Christ. Your old mind and your unredeemed body worked together to bring you to eternal loss. But your mind has been touched, renewed, written on by God. It becomes the enemy of that law that makes evil present with you. Two laws, competing for your life. Serious conflict. Serious situations arise. Sometimes it is easy to see the difference between the old and the new.

Sometimes it takes prayer and fasting and Divine discernment to know which way to go. The soul, the mind, wants to hear from that old master, the body of sin. The spirit pulls away toward God. You are caught in the middle. Without prayer you may go the way that seems right. That's not always good. "Follow your gut" the world will tell you. That's not always good. Life has many close calls and only constant relationship with God will give you the grace to know which way is Spirit and which is flesh. If you sense no war at all you are either still in the flesh unsaved, or you are following the old ways without even asking God if there is something new He has in mind.

"...and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Paul has used the slave and master analogy in the last chapter, dealing with salvation vs the unsaved state. He brings it in here again to remind us



that the slave-master still lives and desires to take back what he has lost. As the text continues to flow, it is apparent still that he is speaking of present-day realities for the Christian. He goes on to say that he is still a wretched man. That it is possible to walk in the flesh. The law of sin is – present tense – still in my members. I must beware!

#### **7:24**

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Many want to read it, O wretched man that I was! Who delivered me from this body of death? Thank you Jesus! I’m saved.

Well there is truth in such a statement. We have been delivered. We are free. Life is new. But this body still hangs on to us. Still so many things we want to do we cannot do. Still so many things we do that we wish we could stop doing. Who will someday deliver me from all this?

MacArthur tells the story of a tribe that lived near Paul’s home city of Tarsus, a city roughly 15 miles off the Mediterranean in what is now Turkey. This tribe had a unique way of punishing murderers. They would take the corpse of the murdered person and lash it tightly to the body of the murderer. Dead bodies decay. The same forces at work in the dead body would transfer to the living body and bring him to a slow and painful death.

Did Paul have this picture in mind when he wrote verse 24? God, there is a body attached to me, a body of sin. It keeps threatening to kill me, using your very law to do it. It is a body of death. How will I ever be delivered from this and by whom?

Of course we know his classic answer:

#### **7:25**

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Is he thanking God through Jesus, or is he saying that it is through Jesus that God will deliver him? I think the latter. Nothing happens in regards to our soul that the entire Godhead is not involved in. So he gives thanks to God in general, and to Jesus in particular, since He is the one whose death and resurrection will make possible our own resurrection in a brand new body that won't be dishonorable and vile and evil and always able to bring us into sin. This body of death will become a sinless body and mind. Sin will have been defeated once and for all, and to God will go all the glory through eternity.

That is the climactic point of the argument. Now the summary of where we have come so far, but by no means the end of the discussion, as a chapter division suggests. The discussion continues uninterrupted in what we have called chapter 8. First the summary:

“So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God...”

I have a renewed mind. I have the very mind of the Spirit. “We have the mind of Christ.” With that mind I serve the law of God. Again, that law is written on my heart from the Holy Ghost. What Moses and the people were shaking about has come to us directly from God. I serve. Not served. But today, serve. Before I served myself and only myself. Now I serve God. I want God. I want His will. I want His ways. I prize His people and His ordinances and His Word. They are my delight. My mind is lined up with the things of the Spirit.

“...but with the flesh the law of sin.”

But there is that other law in me. It is a corrupt law that believes me to be God, that believes I should be in charge, that seeks to please me, not God. That law is called the flesh. Present tense. The flesh, the law, sin, the old marriage partner, the slave-master, call it what you want – and Paul has

called it many things – that principle within is in constant conflict with the law of God. That sums up everything he has said in chapter 7.

After the summary of the argument comes a conclusion that can be drawn from that argument. That's why the next chapter starts with another "therefore." There's a "therefore" or "then" that begins chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 6, chapter 8, chapter 11, chapter 12, and chapter 15. Not to mention the use of that word inside many of those chapters. Paul, and the Spirit inside him, is trying to take us somewhere by one logical argument after another.

"Therefore" is always at the end of one argument and the beginning of another. A young man would not start out a conversation with his beloved, "Therefore I want you to marry me." The woman would say, "But why?" And every time you see that word in the text, you must ask, "But why?"

So let's look at 8:1...

(See Volume II)