

**THE
RIGHTEOUSNESS
OF
GOD**

**A STUDY
OF PAUL'S EPISTLE
TO
THE ROMANS**

Donald R. Taylor

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* is, in my view, one of the most difficult New Testament books to interpret, and certainly illustrates the truthfulness of Peter's famous words about "some things hard to understand" in Paul's writings (2 Peter 3:16). But when we consider that the Bible is the expression of the thoughts of God and the very explanation to mankind of His great "mystery," there is little wonder that it should be both profound and sublime.

Nevertheless, we often hear it said that "the Bible is easy to understand," but surely that is said by those who have never really set themselves to a serious study of it. Paul advised the younger Timothy to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The Greek present active participle *orthotomounta* ("accurately handling," NASB), from the verb *orthotomeo*, literally means "cutting straight" (Thayer). Some have suggested that this word may be referring to a farmer's "ploughing a straight furrow" (Robertson). Using that analogy, and perhaps abusing it a little, I suggest that the Bible is like a farmer's field that must be *ploughed*. And the furrows must be ploughed *straight!* From experience (though very limited), I can say authoritatively that it is difficult to plough a straight furrow! So Paul urges Timothy to "be diligent" in his "ploughing" of the word of God!

To abuse the analogy a bit further, a farmer would certainly be able to produce a sparse crop if he had only a sharp stick with which to till the soil, as did the ancient Navajos, or even today in some undeveloped countries. However, if he had an ox or mule to pull a turning plough, he could greatly improve his crop! But with a tractor and modern farm implements, he could do even better! Those Bible students who only read the KJV may *misread* some sections of the Epistle to the Romans. Chapter five, especially, will be very difficult to understand. In my opinion, one needs to progress to more modern "tools," being careful, of course, in his choices.

Changing from a "farming" analogy to that of a miner of precious metals, I suggest that while one may occasionally discover a nugget of value on the surface, greater riches lie beneath the surface! Sometimes the very meaning of a verse will depend on a single word, and if the reader fails to understand that word, he may misunderstand the entire verse, not to mention the precious lesson Paul wishes to convey.

Does one, therefore, need to be a "scholar" to understand Romans? Not at all, but it would be a mistake to reject out of hand the assistance that various Bible commentaries can afford us. I earnestly desire that the present work might assist the reader in his quest to understand Paul's great dissertation on the subject of justification by faith, which is the nucleus of the Epistle to the Romans.

- Donald R. Taylor

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

In the first fifteen verses of chapter one, Paul identifies himself as the author of this long epistle. Paul wrote this epistle in A.D. 57 from Corinth, the last leg of his lengthy third missionary journey. From Luke's brief statement in Acts 20:2-3, we learn only that Paul stayed there for three months, and that when he was about to set sail for Syria, he discovered a Jewish plot against his life, forcing him to return by land through Macedonia. Of course, we can surmise a great deal about what happened during these three months in Achaia, through a careful reading of Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians, especially the second.

While it is clear even in the first chapter, and much clearer in chapters fifteen and sixteen, that Paul is addressing himself specifically to the Roman church, it is also very clear that this writing is much more than a personal letter to only one church. It is, indeed, the most detailed and thorough discussion in the Bible of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

The epistle to the Romans is a closely reasoned argument proving from Scripture that one cannot be saved by perfect law keeping, but must depend upon the grace of God, freely given to the person who believes on Jesus Christ (4:5), who obeys from the heart the form of teaching given through the apostles (6:3-4, 17-18), and who sets his mind on the Holy Spirit of God (8:4-5, 12-15).

The key passage relating to Paul's argument in Romans is 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" In these verses, Paul declares that the gospel is God's power to save the *believer*, whether Jew or Gentile. This is the tool that God uses to bring about salvation. The gospel is not just the story of how Jesus came to earth, died for sinners, and was raised again from the dead; it is the "message preached" (I Corinthians 1:21-24), which, if believed and obeyed (Romans 10:14-17), saves the sinner.

The powerful gospel of Christ convicts men of sin and reveals how to become God's children. It is God's powerful tool for salvation, not only because it reveals that God is "righteous," but because it reveals how God credits "righteousness" to the believer. This theme runs through the eleventh chapter of the epistle. The Greek noun *dikaiosune* (1:17), here translated "righteousness," may convey various meanings, depending on the context, including "integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting" (Thayer). The verb upon which this noun is

formed is *dikaioo*, which means “to render righteous,” or “to pronounce one to be righteous” (Thayer). Furthermore, the verb was used in a legal sense by the Greeks to “declare guiltless” or to “*acquit* of a charge or reproach” (Thayer). In a Greek court of law, the lawbreaker, although recognized and declared guilty, is *acquitted* and the charges against him are dropped. Although he *ought to be punished* according to the law, he is *set free*. As Paul uses the term *dikaiosisune* in a spiritual sense, he is declaring that although the sinner standing at the bar of God deserves death (Romans 6:23) and eternal punishment, he is *acquitted* through the grace of God, because of his faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9). God declares the sinner to be righteous, not because the sinner is in fact righteous, but because God is crediting him with a righteousness *that is not his own*, the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:4-6; 8:3-4). The believer is “set free from the law [i.e. *principle*] of sin and of death” (8:2), and the “requirement [i.e. *perfect law keeping*] of the Law” (8:4) is “fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Paul’s closes his great argument for “justification by faith” with a soaring doxology (Romans 11:33-36):

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Paul next turns his attention to the matter of “sanctification” (Romans 12:1-15:13). *Sanctification* is the process by which the pardoned believer grows and matures in holiness. As the Apostle Peter wrote: “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (I Peter 2:1-3). In like manner, beginning with Romans 12, Paul discusses the progress of the saved believer as he is “transformed by the renewing” of his mind, and as he demonstrates in his “new life” that God’s will for man is indeed “good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). *Sanctification* is a growth process, from infancy to maturity, which, aided by “the God of hope” will fill the Christian “saint” with “all joy and peace in believing,” so that he “will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

HOW TO USE THE OUTLINE IN YOUR STUDY

The *Outline* is given to assist serious students as they navigate Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The student should have the Outline at hand while reading the Epistle. The *Outline* will help to show the relationship of Paul's ideas as he develops his great argument.

Keeping one's eye on the outline while reading the text of *Romans* can help the reader to follow the argument more clearly. For example, in subsection C of section I, one can easily see that 1, 2, and 3 help to define the "Thesis" of the epistle. For another example, in section III, E, 2, the subsection "d" involves "Blessings that attend God's Children." Paul mentions four of such "blessings."

THE OUTLINE

Address and Greetings (1:1-7)

I. Introduction (1:8-17)

- A. Paul gives thanks for the Roman Christians (1:8-9).
- B. Paul's longtime desire to visit Rome (1:10-15)
- C. Thesis of the letter to the Romans (1:16-17)
 - 1. The gospel is God's power to salvation.
 - 2. God's righteousness (the plan by which he makes men righteous) is revealed in the gospel.
 - 3. Justification is by faith.

II. The universal need for redemption (1:18 - 3:23)

- A. The Gentiles, having had the testimony of God's natural revelation, are without excuse for their sinfulness (1:18-32).
- B. The Jew, who sits in judgment on the Gentile, also stands condemned for doing the same things as the Gentiles (2:1-29).
- C. Conclusion: All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, so the Jew is in no better position than the Gentile, in spite of his many advantages (3:1-23).

III. Both Jew and Gentile must be justified by faith in Christ Jesus and not by works of the Law (3:24 - 8:39).

- A. This does not make void the Law; it rather establishes it (3:24 - 3:31).
- B. Abraham is an example of a man who is justified by faith apart from the Law, since he was justified before either circumcision or the Law was given (4:1-25).
- C. Justification by faith brings peace with God (5:1-21).
 - 1. Grace and forgiveness have come in through Christ, who died for us (5:1-11).
 - 2. The Law, however, brought in sin and condemnation (5:12-14).
 - 3. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (5:15-21).
- D. Those who are justified by faith in Christ must yield their members to God as instruments of righteousness (6:1-23).
 - 1. We who have died to sin, and who have been buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life, have crucified the old man with his evil works (6:1-10).
 - 2. We must now yield our members to God (6:11-20).
 - 3. The wages of sin is death, but the fruit of righteousness is eternal life as a gift from God (6:21-23).
- E. Whereas the law of works was the occasion through which sin brought spiritual death, the gospel is the instrument through which Christ brings peace and forgiveness (7:1 - 8:39).
 - 1. Sin worked through the Law to bring death and condemnation (7:1-25).
 - a. We have been delivered from the Law so that we now serve "in newness of spirit" (7:1-6).
 - b. The Law is holy and good, but it is the means by which sin is made known (7:7-12).

- c. The weakness of the flesh brings wretchedness. (7:13-24).
 - d. Christ delivers the Christian from slavery to the flesh (7:25).
2. There is no condemnation in Christ for the person who is led by the Spirit (8:1-39).
- a. Jesus died for sinners and condemned sin while in the flesh (8:1-4).
 - b. This pardon and freedom is for those who walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh (8:5-13).
 - c. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (8:14-23).
 - d. Blessings attend God's children (8:24-39).
 - (1) The expectation (hope) of salvation (8:24-25).
 - (2) Intercession for us by the Spirit (8:26-27).
 - (3) Assurance that all things work for our good (8:28-30).
 - (4) We are more than conquerors because of God's love for us (8:31-39).

IV. God has not rejected Israel, but will save Israel by faith in the same manner that he saves Gentiles (9:1 - 11:36).

- A. Paul wants Israel according to the flesh to be saved (9:1-5).
- B. Not all those who are descended from Abraham through fleshly Israel are spiritual Israel or the true seed of Abraham (9:6-9).
- C. God's freedom to choose to save Gentiles as well as Jews is shown by other choices he has made by His right of sovereignty (9:10-33).
 - 1. God chose Jacob and his descendants instead of Esau and his descendants, and He did this before their birth, so that the choice might not be based on their works (9:10-16).
 - 2. God raised up Pharaoh to his position as ruler to use him for His purposes (9:17-18).
 - 3. This is further demonstrated by the principle that the potter has power over the clay (9:19-24).
- D. The prophets foretold that Gentiles would also be saved (9:25-33).
 - 1. Hosea's prophecies (9:25-26).
 - 2. Isaiah's prophecies (9:27-29).

- E. The paradox is that Gentiles who did not seek God's righteousness (i.e. pardon) found it, whereas the Jews, who did follow a law of righteousness, did not attain to God's righteousness (9:30 - 10:4).
1. The Gentiles found it through faith (9:30).
 2. The Jews, however, stumbled at faith, and sought salvation through perfect keeping of the Law (9:31-33).
 3. The Jews failed to understand that Christ is the "end" of the Law for righteousness for the believer (10:1-4).
- F. The righteousness of the Law is contrasted with the righteousness of faith (10:5-17).
1. The righteousness which is through the Law requires perfect living (10:5).
 2. The righteousness that is through faith does not require "sight," but is based on trust in a risen Christ (10:6-17).
 - a. Man must believe in Christ and confess Him in order to be saved (10:6-11).
 - b. Everyone, Jew and Greek, must believe (10:12-13).
 - c. This faith comes through hearing of the word of God (10:14-17).
- G. Although Israel was a disobedient and rebellious people, God nevertheless has saved a remnant of them by grace (10:18 - 11:10).
1. As a nation, Israel was disobedient (10:18-21).
 2. God, however, did not reject his people (11:1-10).
 - a. Paul himself was an Israelite and God saved him (11:1).
 - b. There is still a remnant, as there was in Elijah's times (11:2-10).
 - (1) The remnant is chosen on the basis of grace and faith, not of works (11:2-6).
 - (2) The others were rejected because of their spiritual blindness and disbelief (11:7-10).
- H. Israel's fall (as a nation) and the acceptance of the Gentiles (11:11-36)
1. Israel's rejection of Christ was the (apparent) occasion for the acceptance of the Gentiles (11:11).
 2. If Israel had accepted Christ, the results would have been even more wonderful (11:12).

3. Paul's great desire was that his ministry to the Gentiles and their acceptance of Christ would provoke Israel to jealousy and influence Israel to turn to Christ (11:13-15).
4. The analogy of the olive tree illustrates God's principle of exclusion and inclusion (11:16-32).
 - a. Unbelief caused individual Jews to be broken off like dead branches (11:16-20).
 - b. Faith in Christ caused individual Gentiles to be grafted in (11:17-20).
 - c. Those who are presently on the stock must not boast against those who are not, because it is by God's goodness that they so stand (11:18-24).
 - d. Israel must be saved by faith, not as a nation, but as individuals (11:25-27).
 - e. God has not betrayed the ancient covenant which He made with the fathers, but has declared all to be under sin so that He might save all by grace (11:28-32).
5. Paul praises God as he contemplates the depths of God's wisdom (11:33-36).

V. Practical duties that result from the fact that we are justified by grace through faith (12:1 - 15:14).

- A. We must present ourselves as living sacrifices to God (12:1-21).
- B. We must submit ourselves to civil authority (13:1-7).
- C. We must acknowledge the debt of love which we owe to all men (13:8-14).
- D. We must walk charitably toward our brothers in Christ and not argue about matters of opinion (14:1 - 15:14).

VI. Paul discusses his ministry (15:15-33).

- A. His preaching among the Gentiles (15:15-21).
- B. His proposed trip to Spain by way of Rome (15:22-24).
- C. His upcoming voyage to Jerusalem with the collection for the impoverished saints of Judea (15:25-33).

VII. Greetings and concluding admonitions (16:1-27)

- A. Paul's commendation of Phoebe (16:1-3).
- B. Personal greetings to specific persons in Rome (16:3-16).
- C. Warnings concerning divisive people or teachings (16:17-20).
- D. Greetings from various persons who were with Paul (16:21-23).
- E. Farewell statement and a concluding doxology (16:24-27).

CHAPTER ONE

MAJOR CONTENTS: Introduction; greetings; statement of the key principle of Paul’s argument; the Gentile world is under sin.

Chapter one divides itself into four more or less distinct sections: **(1)** Address and Salutation (1:1-7); **(2)** words of praise for the Roman church and Paul’s plans to visit (1:8-15); **(3)** the Thesis of the argument which he develops through the end of chapter eleven (1:16-17); **(4)** the first “leg” of the argument, in which Paul lays out the enormity of the sin of the Gentiles (1:18-32).

1:1-7 – Paul begins his epistle by introducing himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), who appointed him to “bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (1:5). Paul then impresses on his readers that they are “the called of Jesus Christ” (1:6), “beloved of God,” and “saints” (1:7). He then invokes upon them the grace and peace that come, in that order, from “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

1:8-15 – In the succeeding paragraph (1:8-15), after informing the Roman Christians that their faith is “proclaimed throughout the whole world,” and that they have often been mentioned in his prayers (1:8-10), Paul expresses his long-held desire to visit them (1:10-15). He wants to “impart some spiritual gift” to them (1:11). This “gift” need not be understood as a supernatural gift (cf. I Corinthians 12:8-10), and it may indicate only the *mutual encouragement* or strengthening *of each other’s faith* (1:12; 15:24). It was also only natural that the Apostle to the Gentiles would want to proclaim Christ in Rome, the imperial capital. Paul says that he had been “prevented” from coming to Rome (1:13); he explains later what had “prevented” his visit (15:20-25).

1:16-17 – Verses 16-17 express the *key principle*, or *thesis*, of Paul’s argument in this epistle:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

One might wonder why Paul should say that he was “not ashamed” of the gospel, but when we remember that at the center of the gospel stood the cross (I Corinthians 1:23; 2:2), an object of horror, upon which Jesus Christ has been executed as a dangerous criminal, we can understand. One cannot preach the gospel without preaching the cross. We understand that the gospel is the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s power to save

the sinner, but it is more than just “good news.” It is the *message* about His death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:3-19), a message about redemption and atonement. And it also contains injunctions concerning how this message must be *received* and *held fast*: “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain” (I Corinthians 15:1-2).

In the gospel “the *righteousness* of God is revealed.” The word “righteousness,” as used by Paul in the *Epistle to the Romans*, does not refer specifically to a personal attribute of God. The Old Testament had amply revealed the personal “righteousness” of God, often speaking of God as a “righteous” or “just” God. Paul, however, uses the word “righteousness” throughout *Romans* in the sense of *justification* on the basis of faith, so it must be understood here to refer to *God’s plan to save sinners through faith*. The term “righteousness” translates the Greek word *dikaiosune*, a term commonly used among the Greeks in those days, in courts of law, for “acquittal” or “pardon.” The sinner, though guilty, is pardoned, acquitted; he is saved, not by perfect works, but by faith, as Paul will clearly demonstrate by referring to Abraham as an example (4:1-6).

1:18-25 – From verse 18 through the end of the chapter, Paul addresses mankind’s great departure from God. He begins by asserting that men are “without excuse,” since God has made His existence “evident to them” from the very beginning of time (1:19-20), and that proof of His “invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature” have been “clearly seen” by all who contemplate the natural world. To the worshipers of Zeus Paul affirmed, “In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet *He did not leave himself without witness*, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Modern archaeological research indicates that, from prehistoric civilizations to modern times, men of every nation have recognized the existence of an omnipotent Supreme Being. On every continent and on practically every remote island, there is evidence that men have worshiped some Being they called God.

Nearly a thousand years before Paul, David wrote:

*“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!
....When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
which You have ordained.”
(Psalm 8:1, 3)*

But, although men “knew” the true God in the beginning (1:21), they progressed steadily away from Him. This movement away from God was gradual, but the seeds of apostasy were sown early. Moses, in *Genesis*, indicates that long before the Deluge some of Adam’s descendants had wandered from God, referring to some as to “sons of God” and to others as to “daughters of men” (Genesis 6:1-2), probably meaning that the “sons

of God” still believed in the true God, while the descendants “of men” were worshipers of idols. Through intermarriage with the “daughters of men,” the “sons of God” were gradually absorbed into a society that no longer worshiped God. Whether by design or by negligence, they gradually ceased to “honor” the Creator “as God.” Perhaps believing that their own hands were providing them with the things they needed, they stopped thanking God for His benevolence toward them. As they moved further away from a sense of dependence upon Him, they began to believe they were the masters of their own fate, and their “foolish heart was darkened.” The transition was complete. Having turned away from God, they were left only with themselves, so “professing to be wise, they became fools” (1:22). Although they had forgotten the true God, they nevertheless felt the urge to worship, so they made for themselves “gods” in the form of “corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (1:21-25).

1:26-32 – Because God never forced anyone to worship Him, He allowed this departure and man’s consequent descent into degradation, and “gave them over” to “degrading” passions (1:26), “indecent” acts (1:27), and a “depraved mind” (1:28). There is no doubt that Paul here vividly alludes to homosexuality and lesbianism, which Moses also condemned in the Law (Leviticus 18:22). The “depraved mind” is adequately described in 1:28-31. According to Paul, “they” (the Gentiles described in chapter one) “knew” that these things were not proper, but continued not only to do the same but to “give hearty approval” to those who practice them (1:32).

MEMORY VERSE

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”
(Romans 1:16-17)

QUESTIONS

1. Of whom is Jesus the “descendant” according to the flesh?
2. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by what event?
3. Why does Paul thank God for the Roman Christians?
4. Why did Paul want to visit Rome?
5. What had prevented Paul from going to Rome? (Romans 15:20-23)
6. Why did Paul consider himself to be “under obligation” to Greeks and barbarians?
7. Where is the “power of God for salvation” found?
8. What is the technical meaning of the Greek word for “righteousness”?
9. In what way are God’s “invisible attributes” clearly seen?
10. What two “invisible attributes” does Paul specifically mention?
11. What sexual sin does Paul specifically mention?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What are some ways in which Christians can encourage one another?
2. Cite some individuals who have personally had a great impact for good in your life.
3. Can a person come to a belief in God without the Bible?
4. How does Paul’s discussion of the movement away from God serve as paradigm for modern man?

CHAPTER TWO

MAJOR CONTENTS: The Jews are convicted of sin on the same basis as Gentiles; there is no favoritism with God; sinners are to be judged according to the light they have; “genetic” Jews are not necessarily “real” Jews.

2:1-2 – In chapter two, Paul stands as though a prosecutor in a court of Law. The Gentiles are on trial, as it were, before the Supreme Judge of the universe, and the prosecutor is making his closing argument. Having described the evil deeds of the Gentiles in ugly detail in chapter one, he has pronounced them worthy of the death penalty. “Although they know the ordinance of God,” he cries, “that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them!” (1:32). He then, unexpectedly, turns to the audience and looks toward the Jews, who sat as the chief witnesses against the Gentiles. The Jews were God’s special people and were *supposed* to represent God in this world. Indeed, many Gentiles admired the superior moral code and conduct of the Jewish people, and they were right in so doing. But as the prosecutor observes the Jews in this court room, he points toward them an accusing finger (2:1). As he begins to speak, instead of the “they” of chapter one, he uses “you,” sternly declaring, “You have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (2:1). Before God, the Jews stood equally as guilty as the Gentiles, but they did not see themselves so. Paul implies that their guilt was perhaps even greater than that of the Gentiles, since they at least had the written Law of God (2:12-14).

As the Jewish members of the Roman church sat with their Gentile brothers in Christ, listening to a first reading of Paul’s Epistle, they who might have inwardly applauded the recitation of the sins of the Gentiles (1:28-32) no doubt blushed with shame as Paul’s words cut deeply into their hearts. Although it had perhaps been easy for them to listen to and to agree with Paul’s assessment of the guilt of the Gentiles, so horrific and inexcusable was that sin, suddenly the light of God was shining on the Jews, forcing them to agree that Jews, as well as Gentiles, stood in need of repentance!

2:3-4 – It was unconscionable to Paul, as it is to us, that the Jew should stubbornly refuse to admit his own sinfulness while condemning haughtily that of the Gentiles (2:3). Such an attitude appears demeaning and demonstrates that perhaps the Jews cared little about the “riches” of God’s “kindness and tolerance and patience” that led both Jews and Gentiles to repentance (2:4). Did the Jews not know that their “stubborn” and “unrepentant heart” was storing up wrath for themselves in the day that

they, like the Gentiles, would be sitting in the box of the accused in God's great courtroom?

2:5-11 – “There is no partiality with God,” says Paul (2:11). He will grant eternal life to those who “seek glory and honor and immortality” (2:7), but will visit His “wrath and indignation” upon those who “do not obey the truth” (2:8). Jews and Gentiles will be treated the same before God's bar of justice.

2:12-15 – God, however, is supremely *just*. Sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles, are judged according to the light they have (2:12-16). The Gentiles did not have the Law of Moses, so they would be judged “without the Law” (2:12), while the Jews would be judged “by the Law.” *Having* the Law is not enough; *hearing* the Law will not suffice; *doing* the Law is required (2:13). Most of the *moral precepts* included in the Law of Moses were generally accepted by people who had never even heard of Moses or his Law, and many Gentiles did “instinctively the things of the Law” (2:14). When Paul says that such people “are a law to themselves,” he does not mean to say that people may decide for themselves what is right or wrong; rather, he means that *their correct understanding* of right and wrong becomes the standard by which they are judged (2:15). For God to judge otherwise would seem to be unjust, for “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Romans 5:13).

2:16 – The concept just stated may be difficult for some to grasp, and some have deduced from it some extreme conclusions. Observe, however, that it is absolutely true that *sinners are saved by “faith” in Christ*. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has *disbelieved* shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16, NASB). Jesus said that “believers” will be saved, but that “*disbelievers*” will be lost. To *disbelieve* is a positive action, which one cannot perform until he first *hears* the gospel. Lest the reader construe my words to mean that we might do a disservice to unbelievers when we take the gospel to them, since they might “*disbelieve*” and be lost, I hasten to say that nothing could be further from the truth, and such an idea is not at all my intent. The *world is in sin* and needs to hear the gospel. Sinners are not lost just because they do not believe, but because they are *sinners!* And because they are sinners, they are without hope. Only the gospel can offer them hope. God, who knows the hearts and minds of men, is the ultimate judge of who will be saved or lost (2:16).

2:17-24 – Paul discusses the hypocrisy of the Jews who, claiming a special tie with God, felt that they were *superior to their Gentile brothers in Christ* (2:17-24). But Paul's words in chapters two and three appear to be addressed more broadly to Jews in general, and not just to Christian Jews. Paul is saying that it is not enough to be a “Jew,” to claim to “rely upon the Law,” or to “boast” that one knows the true God. It is not enough just to “know” the will of God (2:17-18). One must *practice* the truth that one knows! One cannot claim to be a “guide to the blind,” a “light” to those in darkness, a “corrector” of the foolish, or a “teacher of the immature” if one does not teach oneself (2:19-21), or if one fails to practice what he preaches (2:22-24).

2:25-26 – Circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with Israel, and as such it had value. But since a covenant must be observed by both sides, this “sign” would have value for the individual Jew only if he abided by the details of the covenant, only if he practiced the Law (2:25). For the Jew who does not practice the Law, his “circumcision has become uncircumcision” (2:25). Paul argues that the converse would be true for the Gentile who “keeps the requirements of the Law.” This Gentile’s “uncircumcision” would be “regarded as circumcision” by God (2:26).

2:27-29 – Many Christian Jews continued to believe that Gentile converts should be circumcised in order to be true Christians (cf. Galatians 5:1-8), but Paul argues in *Romans* that the uncircumcised man who *keeps the requirements* of the Law is more pleasing to God than the man who *is physically circumcised* (2:25-27). He concludes the chapter by arguing that the *real* “Jew” is the person who from the heart keeps God’s will, and that this “Jewishness” has nothing to do with physical circumcision or fleshly ancestry. “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” (2:28-29).

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” (Romans 2:1)

QUESTIONS

1. Why should people refrain from “judging” others?
2. What does the kindness of God lead man to do?
3. What do impenitent people treasure up for themselves?
4. What will the disobedient receive in the judgment?
5. How does God view those who “by nature do the things contained in the Law”?
6. How does God view the person who keeps one commandment but breaks another?
7. What action would cause a Jew’s “circumcision” to become “uncircumcision”?
8. According to God, who is the real Jew?
9. Which “circumcision” really counts?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Is there a natural tendency among humans to feel that somehow one’s own race is superior to another?
2. Is it not easier to hear another person’s sins and guilt discussed than our own?
3. What is the difference between “believe” and “disbelieve”?
4. How do you feel about the multitudes of people who will be lost without ever hearing the gospel of Christ?

CHAPTER THREE

MAJOR CONTENTS: In spite of great advantages, the Jews are not better than the Gentiles; the Law has made all accountable to God; justification can come only through faith in Jesus Christ.

3:1-8 – In view of Paul’s conclusions in the first two chapters, that Jews, like Gentiles, also stood condemned as sinners before God (2:1), Paul’s Jewish readers at Rome might have proposed some sly questions intended to destroy Paul’s logic (3:1). The ensuing conversation might have been as follows, as I paraphrase some of the questions and responses:

Jewish Christians: “Brother Paul, if what you say is correct, what advantage do Jews have?”

Paul responds that Jews, the fleshly descendants of Abraham, did indeed have a “great advantage” over the Gentiles, in that the written “oracles of God” (3:2) were “entrusted” to the Jews.

Jewish Christians, in a follow-up question: “The unfaithfulness of some Jews will not cause God to be unfaithful regarding his promises, will it?” (3:3).

Paul: “Of course not! God will keep his word in spite of man’s unfaithfulness” (3:4).

Jewish Christians: “It appears to us that our unrighteousness, by contrast, actually makes God’s righteousness stand out more gloriously! So, if God punishes us, that would make him unrighteous, wouldn’t it?” (3:5).

Paul: “Of course not! If that were true, it would be impossible for God to judge the world” (3:5-6).

Jewish Christians: “But if my lie, my unfaithfulness, has made God’s truth look good, why does he still judge me as a sinner?” (3:7).

Paul, speaking rather harshly and sarcastically (3:8), suggests, “Why then don’t you just go ahead and maintain (as some slanderously report that *we* say) that we ‘may do evil that good may come?’”

Of course, Paul never taught that one may do evil that good may come! He did teach that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:21), and some may have twisted his words, claiming that he taught that one could “continue in sin so that grace” could increase (6:1). Peter, Paul’s friend and fellow apostle, would later say that “the untaught and unstable” did indeed distort some of Paul’s words “to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).

3:9-20 – In Romans 3:9, Paul returns to the question, “Then what advantage has the Jew?” He concludes that, in spite of their truly great advantages (the Law of Moses, the prophets, etc.), the Jews were in fact no better than the Gentiles in that “both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.” He follows with a selection of verses from the *Psalms* and *Isaiah* which bolster this conclusion (3:10-18). These verses, being a part of “the Law,” speak to the Jews (who are “under the Law”), and effectively shut their mouths, rendering their arguments invalid, demonstrating that no one could be saved by perfect law keeping. In fact, according to Paul (3:19-20), the Law really *reveals* man’s sins!

3:21-24 – In Romans 3:21, Paul returns to the thesis proposed in 1:16-17, that all men alike must be *justified* by faith, adding that such *justification* is “apart from the law.” The pardon which is extended to the guilty party is a “gift” made possible by God’s amazing grace, and purchased by the blood of the Son of God (3:24). Remember that the English verb *justify* translates the Greek verb **dikaioo**, to “declare someone to be righteous.” The noun **dikaiosis** is everywhere translated “righteousness.” The word “justification,” which translates the Greek words **dikaion** and **dikaiosis** (both derived from **dikaioo**), occurs in Romans 4:25; 5:16,18, and must be understood to refer to *the process by which the guilty sinner is acquitted and forgiven by God, the divine Judge*.

3:23-26 – Since “all have sinned” and come short of perfection (3:23), and since “the wages of sin is death” (6:23), the question might be raised how God could save the sinner and still be “just” or “righteous.” God solved the problem by offering his Son as a “propitiation” (3:25), a satisfactory substitution, so that “He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:26). Paul’s evocation of the “propitiation” would have struck a familiar chord in the minds of his Jewish readers, since such offerings had been made regularly on the great altar in front of the Temple in Jerusalem, and even before that in the Tabernacle, especially on the *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). In his treatise to the Hebrews, the inspired writer, whom many in the earliest times thought to be Paul, later wrote in more detail,

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Hebrews 9:11-15).

3:27-28 – Because it was the Christ who procured forgiveness and “righteousness,” and not we ourselves, there is no place for boasting about any good works that we may have done. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of

works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). According to Paul, boasting is excluding, not by a “law” of works, but by a “law of faith” (2:37). Although he is contrasting “works” and “faith,” he seems to be using the word “law” in the sense of “principle,” as in 7:23 and 8:2 (see our notes there). He is saying that our salvation from sin is not based upon the principle of merit or earned status, but upon the principle of trust in Him who has died in our stead. As Martin Luther delved into the study of *Romans* during his translation of the New Testament, he was so struck by this concept that, perhaps wishing to exaggerate the contrast between salvation by works of merit (as the Catholic teaching implied) and salvation by faith (that Paul taught), he added the German word *allein* (“only”) in his German language translation of Romans 3:28, making it read “by faith *only*.” It is doubtful that Luther intended by this addition to say that nothing but faith matters in man’s response to the Gospel, and that man is saved at the very point of belief in Christ, yet this is the way many today understand it. But, taken in the present context, this idea is foreign to Paul’s meaning. Paul’s emphasis is on the fact that salvation is *based on faith* and not upon perfect law keeping (3:28).

3:29-30 – The Law of Moses was given only to Israel. The Gentiles were “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). But God “is not “the God of Jews only,” exclaimed Paul (3:29). He is the “God of Gentiles also,” and “will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (3:30).

3:31 – Paul concludes the chapter by raising and answering one final possible objection to his argument concerning justification by faith apart from the Law of Moses. He suggests that someone might argue that this teaching would “nullify” or “make void” (KJV) the Law! Paul denies this categorically, affirming that, on the contrary, justification by faith really “establishes” the Law (3:31), since it fulfills the intent and aim of the Law.

MEMORY VERSE

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:21-24)

QUESTIONS

1. What principal advantage did the Jew have over the Gentile?
2. Would the unbelief of the Jew cause God to be unfaithful?
3. Is God unjust when he punishes the evildoer?
4. How was Paul being “slandered” by some people?
5. Why were the Jews not any better than the Gentiles?
6. To whom did the Law of Moses speak?
7. How many humans have sinned, according to Paul?
8. How are men and women “freely justified”?
9. What does God’s redemption in Christ clearly demonstrate at the present time?
10. Does the teaching of justification by faith “nullify the Law”?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What advantages do we have in our country over people in most other nations, as far as faith and the practice of religion are concerned?
2. Is “the ends justify the means” an acceptable practice before God?
3. How can God be just and still justify the ungodly?
4. Is it possible for a human being to live a perfect life?

CHAPTER FOUR

MAJOR CONTENTS: Abraham is the great example of a man justified by faith apart from works of Law, and apart from circumcision; God credits righteousness to the believer.

4:1-3 – To demonstrate that the doctrine of “justification by faith” does not nullify the Law, Paul cites the example of Abraham (4:1-10), who received God’s promise of justification through faith some 430 years before the Law even existed (Galatians 3:17-18). According to Paul, notwithstanding an obedient life, Abraham had nothing to boast about before God “according to the flesh” (4:1-2). None of his good works was sufficient to earn his salvation. However, because he believed implicitly God’s promise that even in his old age he and Sarah would have a son (4:3; Genesis 15:6), God credited this trusting faith to Abraham as *righteousness*.

4:4-12 – Paul argues that a person who *works* at a job *merits his wages*. These wages are *owed* to him as an *obligation*, something that is *due* him; his employer does not pay him wages as a *favor*. But God justifies the sinner, not as a “wage” but as a *favor*, because of His grace (4:4-5). Paul cites David’s words concerning the “blessedness” of forgiveness (4:6-8; Psalm 32:3-5).

Although the Lord’s brother James, in his epistle, emphasizes the necessity of obedience, demonstrating that belief alone is not sufficient for salvation (James 2:18-24), God, in a sense, *rewarded* Abraham, *not* for his obedient works, which were many, but for his *belief*. “Belief” here must be understood as absolute *trust* that God would keep his word. So strong was Abraham’s trust in God’s promise that when later instructed to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham immediately set out to do the deed, trusting that, following the sacrifice, God would resurrect Isaac, so that the promise would be fulfilled (Hebrews 11:17-19). In Abraham’s mind, the deed was done even before he left home with his son (Genesis 22:1-8).

God’s initial promise to Abraham was that “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3). This promise would be fulfilled through his son Isaac. Because God said “*all* the families of the earth,” we understand that this “blessing” of justification would not be for Jews alone, but would include the “uncircumcised” Gentiles (4:9-12). The fact that Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised signifies that circumcision had nothing to do with his justification, and therefore has nothing to do with the justification of future descendants of Abraham, thus allowing Abraham to be “the father of all who believe without being circumcised” (4:11), so long as they “follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham” (4:12). It must, however, be remembered that Abraham’s faith was always an *obedient* faith. He had *obeyed* when God had told him to leave his home and people and to go to a country

which God would show him (Hebrews 11:8). He *obeyed* when God later told him to sacrifice his “only begotten son” (Hebrews 11:17; *monogenes*, “unique”), but it was his trusting, obedient *faith* that was *credited* to him for righteousness. No man’s faith will so be credited unless it is an *obedient* faith.

4:11-13 – Since Abraham received his promise *before* the Law of Moses was given on Sinai, his “justification” was in no way the result of keeping the works of the Law. According to Paul, this promise of justification by faith was not only made to Abraham, but “to his descendants” as well (4:11-13), so that those who *believe* in Christ are justified by faith, even as was Abraham, and are considered to be “descendants” and “heirs” of Abraham (4:11-12, 23-25).

4:13-15 – Furthermore, the promise God made to Abraham and to his descendants was not made “through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (4:13). Therefore, “those who are of the Law” (i.e. those who think that perfect law keeping can save) are not “heirs” of the promise made to Abraham (4:14), for if they were heirs, the promise itself would be “nullified” and “faith” would be “made void.” This is true because the doctrine of justification by faith was foreseen and provided for even by the Law of Moses. To deny it would therefore be to say that the Law was in error, thus effectively *nullifying the Law*. To claim that one can be saved by perfect law keeping (i.e. “through the Law”) would then in turn *nullify faith!* Since the existence of law causes “violation” of law, even the Law of Moses can only condemn, as Paul says, “The Law brings about wrath,” not salvation (4:15).

4:16-22 – “For this reason,” justification is “by faith” (4:16), so that the promise made to Abraham is meant for all of the “descendants” of Abraham, Gentiles as well as Jews (4:16). Although Abraham certainly did not understand the future application of the events surrounding the promise, Paul says that Abraham’s great faith, “hoping against hope,” believing that the God “who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” could do what He promised (4:17-21). Abraham’s profound faith “was also credited to him as righteousness” (4:22).

4:23-26 – Paul says that the record of God’s conversation with Abraham was written down and preserved “for our sake,” since even as Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness, so also our faith will be credited to us who “believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:23-25).

Paul’s concluding words of chapter four are somewhat unexpected. Paul has argued that Christ’s death and resurrection were *in order to* secure our justification (3:24-26), but here (4:25) Paul says it was “*because* of our transgressions” that he was “delivered over,” and it was “*because* of our justification” that he was raised up. Indeed, our sins *were the cause* of His death on the cross, and if there had been *no need* for justification, His death and resurrection would not have occurred. The KJV uses “for” in verse 25, but in both cases the Greek construction is *dia* with the accusative, meaning “because of.”

MEMORY VERSE

“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4:13)

QUESTIONS

1. Did Abraham have anything to boast about “according to the flesh”?
2. Only upon what basis would he have something to boast about?
3. Is salvation granted to a person on the basis of *debt* or of *grace*?
4. To whom is faith “accounted for righteousness”?
5. Had Abraham already been circumcised when his faith was accounted to him for righteousness?
6. Of whom did Abraham, by his faithful life, become the “father”?
7. Did the promise to Abraham and his seed come through the Law?
8. What does not exist where there is no law?
9. How old was Abraham when he “believed God,” with regard to his having children?
10. For whose sake was it written that Abraham’s faith was accounted to him for righteousness”?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. When you pick up your paycheck, do you feel that your employer has done you a favor by paying you?
2. What is the difference between “believe” and “trust”?
3. Have you ever made a “leap of faith” that in any way resembles that of Abraham?

CHAPTER

FIVE

MAJOR CONTENTS: Peace with God comes through faith in Christ Jesus; God's great love is demonstrated in that Christ died, not for the just man or the good man, but for the ungodly; sin entered into the world through the single sin of one man, but the abundant grace of God entered through the single act of righteousness of Jesus Christ.

5:1-2 – Chapter five begins as a conclusion to Paul's argument in chapter four. Paul assumes that he has proven his point on justification by faith (5:1), and proceeds to discuss some added blessings that come through faith: **(1)** peace with God, **(2)** access to a state of grace, **(3)** and hope of the glory of God (5:1-2).

5:2-8 – Armed with such peace and hope, the Christian is able to confront adversity with patience and steadfastness (5:2-5). The peace experienced by the child of God goes far beyond the simple *absence* of trouble or trials; Paul calls it "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:9). The Christian is never promised a life without struggles or problems; rather he is assured of God's continual presence, thus the ability to confront any fears without anxiety. The world cannot understand *this* "peace."

The "grace" to which we have access through Christ is *spiritual strength* which enables us to stand firm against the adversary, to stand our ground, and to persevere (cf. Ephesians 6:10-14). James uses "grace" in this sense when he urges the Christian to "resist the devil" (James 4:6-7), saying that God "gives a *greater* grace," or "*more* grace" (KJV), to those who so resist evil. The troubles which the Christian faces also serve the incidental purpose of character building. The stronger character, formed through confrontation with troubles, enables one to continue on without giving up.

Finally, the "hope" which comes through trusting God is certain; it will not disappoint (5:5). Hope is not a vague *wishing* that something will come to pass, as we are accustomed to say, for example, "I *hope* things get better!" Hope implies *expectation*. The child of God expects to see the "glory of God." As was true with Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-16), the heaven that we cannot see is as real to the Christian as the earth that we do see! The love of God that "has been poured out within our hearts" (Romans 5:5), and which Christians experience daily through the Holy Spirit, is an ever present demonstration and reminder of that hope. Paul's mention of God's love (5:5) prompts an exalted statement of the immensity of it (5:6-8). Christ died for the "ungodly"! The "righteous" man, one who prides himself on doing exactly what the Law requires, no more but no less, would hardly inspire another person to die for him! Perhaps, however, someone might give his life to protect a "good" man, a person known as one who goes

beyond the call of duty for a friend. But Christ died for the “sinner,” one who is neither “righteous” nor “good” as in Paul’s illustration. That Christ would give His life specifically for *sinners* is a magnificent demonstration of the wonderful love of God!

5:9-11 – Christ’s sacrificial death not only “justifies” and *saves* us from “wrath” to come, but it “reconciles” us to God. Then, “much more” than that, “having been reconciled by his death, we shall be saved by his life” (5:10). Christ did not remain in the tomb; he arose and lives on for our benefit. Peter affirms that the Christian is “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:5).

5:12-21 – Paul’s argument through the remainder of the chapter (5:12-21) is that, as horrible as *sin* may be, *salvation in Christ is much better!* Sin entered through *one* man, Adam, resulting in “death.” In the Garden of Eden, God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit of a certain tree they would “die” (Genesis 3:3). Satan, however, using the word “die” in a different sense, told Eve that she would *not* “die” if she ate the fruit. When the pair ate the fruit, they *did die spiritually*, in the sense meant by God, being *banished from God’s presence*, but their *physical death* resulted directly from their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, making it impossible for them to continue eating the fruit of the “tree of life” (Genesis 3:22-24).

Paul, speaking of “*spiritual*” death, writes that “death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). People who have not “sinned” also die *physically* (for example, babies and mentally impaired persons), but *spiritual* death can only occur where an individual has personally *sinned*. This “spiritual” death would continue to “reign” from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not committed the same rebellious sin that Adam committed (5:14).

Nowhere does the Bible teach that somehow, as a result of Adam’s sin, mankind’s “nature” was corrupted, causing children to be born with a corrupt nature, or with a penchant or inclination to sin. The Gnostic idea of an inherently evil fleshly body is not taught in the Bible, which plainly states, “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity” (Ezekiel 18:20). The doctrine of “Original Sin” was unknown to the Jews and is not taught in the Bible. Although those who espouse the doctrine usually refer to this section of *Romans* for proof, the fact is that it evolved gradually during the third and fourth centuries A.D., and is largely based on the teachings of the mystic, Augustine of Hippo (Ferguson 61). Babies are not “born in sin” as Catholicism and Calvinism both teach. One becomes a sinner when he “transgresses” the law of God. In Paul’s words, “death spread to all men, *because all sinned*” (5:12). Long after Adam’s sin, the Law of Moses was given “so that the transgression would *increase*” (5:20), since where there is no law, there can be no disobedience to law (4:15). But, reflecting the greatness of God’s love, as sin “increased,” God’s grace “abounded all the more” (5:20).

Paul contrasts the result of Adam’s sin with the result of Christ’s act of “righteousness,” saying that “the free gift is *not like* the transgression.” They are, in fact,

different in several ways: **(1)** Many “died” as the result of one man’s transgression, but many received “grace” through one man, Jesus Christ (5:15); **(2)** Through the single transgression of one man “judgment arose,” but after “many transgressions” justification resulted (5:16); **(3)** “Death reigned” as a result of one man’s sin, but “much more, those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ” (5:17); **(4)** Through one man’s transgression “there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (5:18); **(5)** Through the one man’s “disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (5:19).

Adam is said to be a “type” of Christ (5:14) only in one sense, that through the *sin* of *one* man, sin entered the world, bringing with it the death of “*many*” (5:15, while through the *obedience* of “one Man, Christ” life would be made available to *all* (5:15). *Death* came after only one sin, but *life* came after innumerable sins (5:15-19).

Note the repetition of the expression “much more” in this section (5:9, 10, 15, 17), an expression that emphasizes that although *much* was lost because of Adam’s sin, “*much more*” was gained through Christ’s obedience.

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2)

QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul say about *faith*, *peace*, and *grace* in 5:1-2?
2. What does tribulation produce?
3. What does perseverance produce?
4. What has been poured out in our hearts?
5. For whom would a person hardly give his life?
6. For whom would one perhaps die?
7. For whom did Jesus give his life?
8. Through whom did sin enter the world?
9. How is the “free gift” not like the “offense”?
10. In what does the “free gift” result?
11. What is the result of “one man’s” obedience?
12. What abounded more when sin abounded?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What does the *peace of God* do for you?
2. What kind of “grace” or “spiritual strength” has God supplied to you personally?
3. Is sin or guilt passed from fathers to children in any sense through DNA?

CHAPTER

SIX

MAJOR CONTENTS: The baptized believer, having been raised to walk in newness of life, must resolve to be God’s slave, not the slave to sin; to continue in sin means death.

Chapter six is governed specifically by one main theme: Those who are justified by faith in Christ must yield their members to God as instruments of righteousness. There are, however, three subordinate elements: **(1)** Those who have died to sin and who have been buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life, have crucified the “old self” (“our old man” - KJV) with his evil works (6:1-10); **(2)** They must now yield their members to God (6:11-20); **(3)** The wages of sin is death, but the fruit of righteousness is eternal life as a gift from God (6:21-23).

6:1-2 – Since the Christian must no longer be a servant of sin, but of righteousness, it would be ridiculous to argue that because sin brings grace, many sins would bring more grace! Nevertheless, Paul begins the chapter with such a question, hoping perhaps, to forestall any such trivial objection from his Jewish readers (6:1): “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” Paul reminds his readers that when they were “baptized into Christ” they were “baptized into His death” (6:2-5). Although water baptism (Gr: *baptisma*) is “submersion,” or “immersion” (Thayer), and therefore a suitable symbol of a death, burial, and resurrection, reminding us of what Jesus accomplished for us at the cross, it is really much more than that. Nowhere does the Bible say, as some contend, that baptism is only a *symbol* of an “inward grace” already received. Rather, it is an act of obedience similar to Abraham’s act of obedience when he took Isaac to the sacrificial altar. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that a person becomes a Christian before baptism, or without baptism. Certainly, it is never recorded in Scripture that anyone ever suggested that baptism might not be necessary for salvation.

6:3-7 – The expression “baptized into His death” (6:3) appears to be equivalent to the expression “become united with Him in the likeness of His death” (6:5), and with the phrase “crucified with Him” (6:6). Paul elsewhere proclaims, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). And again, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were *baptized into Christ* have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27), and “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Where there was a “death” – a “crucifixion” – there was also a “burial” (6:4). And where there was a “burial” there was also a resurrection! So a penitent believer dies and is buried. He is not buried alive, but dead. Then, like the Lord, he is “raised” to walk “in newness of life” (6:4). This is not “baptismal regeneration.” Nowhere in the Bible is

baptism called a “sacrament.” There is no magical power in the water or in the “ceremony” which could effect forgiveness or change a sinner’s heart. Baptism apart from faith and repentance is useless, and without further spiritual growth in what the Bible calls “sanctification” the baptized person remains a “baby” (cf. I Peter 1:22 – 2:3). Neither is baptism a “work” of which one might boast, no more than of any other obedient action. Abraham could not have boasted of his obedience to God’s order to sacrifice his son, but had he not done what God required, his faith would not have been “perfected” (James 2:21-22), and he would not have been called “the friend of God” (James 2:23).

Christ’s death brings benefits to those who believe in Him, and believers are immersed “into His death,” that is, into the *benefits* of His death. Just as Christ died and was raised up again to life, the repentant sinner who is “buried with Him through baptism into death” is also “raised,” in a spiritual sense, so as to “walk in newness of life.” The baptized believer has been “crucified.” The sinful person that he once was is no longer a slave, or servant, to sin. He has been set free from sin (6:6-7).

6:8-16– In a spiritual sense, the penitent sinner has joined Christ on the cross, dying with Him in order to live with Him as a transformed person (6:8-11). Although the “new birth” really begins when the sinner first hears the message of the cross, when the gospel message first enters his heart and begins “to perform its work” (I Thessalonians 2:13), Paul obviously views baptism as an act of obedience which signals *the end of the old life and the beginning of the new*. The new creature is not complete in Christ until baptism.

Because the new Christian has been “freed from sin” (6:7), it is imperative that he not “let sin reign” in his body (6:12); he must not continue to “obey its lusts.” The new Christian must not “go on presenting the members” of his body as “instruments of unrighteousness.” Instead, he must now conduct himself as an “instrument” of righteousness (6:13). These instructions show that baptism does not of itself effect any change in a person’s DNA or diminish the pull of temptation. The new Christian must yet struggle, perhaps more than before, as he resists sin. Paul declares pointedly that one must not let sin *continue to reign* over him; he must not continue to live as before! One must not allow sin to become the master!

On the contrary, the new Christian must *continue to present* his members as “instruments of righteousness to God” (6:13). Even *before* baptism, the penitent sinner makes the choice whether to continue to be a “slave of sin” (6:16), which can only end in spiritual death, or to be a “slave for obedience,” which will bring “righteousness” (i.e. *forgiveness* and *justification*). Following baptism, the struggle continues as long as there is life, but with the help of God, one can prevail.

6:17-19 – Paul then restates in Romans 6:15 the frivolous objection of verse 1, which may actually have been suggested by some Jewish readers: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Paul gives to this question the resounding response, “May it never be!” Grace does not give anyone permission to

continue to sin. Those who have become “obedient from the heart” to God’s command to be baptized (6:17) are “freed from sin,” as Paul has previously written in the beginning of this chapter, and have become “slaves of righteousness” (6:18). Paul concludes the paragraph by urging Christians to live as “slaves to righteousness,” which will result in their sanctification (6:19).

6:20-23 – Paul concludes the chapter (6:20-23) by reminding his readers that before their conversion to Christ, the only “benefit” they had from their sinful life was “death” (6:21). But the “benefit” of the new life in Christ is “sanctification,” or *holiness*, resulting in “eternal life” (6:22). “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23). Sin *earns* death, a deserved and merited “wage.” But eternal life, God’s free gift, cannot be earned or deserved.

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of

the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” (Romans 6:4-5)

QUESTIONS

1. Is it alright for a Christian to continue in sin simply because of the abundance of God’s grace?
2. Into whom is a person baptized?
3. What is represented when a person emerges from the water of baptism?
4. What should we not allow to “reign” in our body?
5. Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?
6. What is the “form of doctrine” mentioned by Paul?
7. What kind of “fruit” should we bear in our lives as Christians?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What should be the “walk” of the baptized person?
2. In what sense is the Christian “not under law”?
3. Is “sin” ever a “done deal” in the sense that the Christian cannot say “No” to temptation?
4. Discuss salvation as a gift as opposed to a wage.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: Those in Christ have been released from the Law of Moses and serve God “in newness of the Spirit”; the Law, although good and having a good purpose, demonstrates man’s weakness; the man who attempts to attain perfection through perfect keeping of the Law will fail.

7:1-6 – The principal subject of this chapter is the Christian’s relationship to the Law. Paul shows that the Law has no “jurisdiction” over the Christian (7:1-6). He illustrates this by showing that a woman whose husband dies is no longer bound by the law to her husband. Likewise, the Christian, having “died to the Law,” may be said to be “married” to Christ, serving God now “in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (7:6). The word “letter” (Gr: *grammatos*) refers to the written Law of Moses. Christians are “bound” to Christ by a *new covenant* (7:4-6).

7:7-12 – Paul says that he came to “know sin” through the commandment against covetousness (7:7), the tenth of the “Ten Commandments.” He has already noted that the Law *arouses* “the sinful passions” of the man who is “in the flesh” (7:5), the *unconverted person* whose mind is “set on the things of the flesh” (8:5). This is a restatement of his previous words, “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase” (5:20). Such language might certainly have aroused the indignation of some of Paul’s Jewish readers in Rome, who may have thought that Paul was disrespecting the Law of Moses. “What shall we say then?” they might have protested. “Is the Law sin?” To this Paul replied, “May it never be!” On the contrary, “The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (7:12). But the very Law which was intended for “good” (7:13) had become “a cause of death” for Paul, because he would not have “known” sin except through the Law (7:7). The tenth commandment said, “You shall not covet!” Perhaps, when young Saul of Tarsus “coveted,” he sinned (7:9-11), losing his childhood innocence, an allusion to the *sinless state of childhood*. Paul writes, “I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died” (7:9).

7:13 – Although sin (i.e. disobedience) is the direct result of law, law is necessary in any society, if for nothing else, to preserve order. Therefore, the *intent* of the Law was beneficial. But again, an opponent of Paul’s argument might have asked, “Did that which is good become a cause of death for me?” This would be to *blame* the Law for man’s sinful predicament, to which suggestion Paul exclaimed, “Not so!” (7:13). Sin was always in the world and men were always sinners, but specific sins could not be credited since there were no laws. But when the Law of Moses was given at Sinai, it explained in great detail a huge number of evil actions *that were already practiced* by mankind. So Paul said, “I would not have known” that coveting was wrong except for the Law, which forbade it. And he would not have known the *despicable nature* of sin without the Law. The Law was given “so that through the commandment sin would become *utterly sinful*” (7:13).

7:14 – The Law, Paul says, was “spiritual” (7:14). It failed, however, to make men righteous, because men were “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” The Law did discourage people from doing certain evil actions, and it encouraged people to do good things, but it *could not make them sinless*. Paul demonstrates this by describing the spiritual conflict to which we all must admit (7:14-25). Too often, we have done things that we knew were wrong, suffering the inevitable bad conscience. We did not want to do these things, but we succumbed to the temptation only to regret it later. We all know people who have struggled all their life against sin, until they met Christ. Paul aptly describes the sinner who is struggling to live above sin, but without success. I maintain, however, that Paul is not speaking literally of himself personally when he says, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (7:14). Paul had been *set free from sin*, no longer to be its “slave” (6:16, ff). When Paul writes, “I am speaking in human terms” (6:19), he evidently means that he is using an *analogy* for illustrative purposes, and we must understand his words in chapter seven in this way. Nevertheless, there is the suggestion that even the Christian could find himself doing what he recognizes to be sinful. Paul says, even of himself, “But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (I Cor. 9:27).

7:14-23 – The word “law” (Gr. *nomos*) in 7:21, 23, and in 8:2 should be understood in the sense of “principle” in the same way that we talk about the “law of gravity.” Although usually referring in *Romans* to the Law of Moses, as it does in 7:14, 16, and in a more general sense to the “law of God,” as in 7:22, the context of Romans 7:21 through 8:4 demands that the word *nomos* be understood as of a *generally understood principle*, as the NASB translates it in 7:21. In this context, the word does not mean “law” in the sense of a command to be obeyed. Rather, Paul is referring to the phenomenon experienced by every sincere person who, although wanting to do what is right, finds that evil desire within him makes it very difficult. When one sincerely wants to “concur with the law of God” (7:22), the “principle of sin” which is in his “members” proves to be a hindrance (7:23).

7:24-25 – The sincere sinner who wants to be free from sin cries out in despair, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (7:24) Immediately, Paul answers that Jesus Christ can set the sinner free (7:25). The remainder of verse 25 has been misused by some to suggest that the saved person may indeed sin with impunity. The claim is made that the “born again” believer cannot lose his salvation; though he might lose the “joy” of his salvation, he will still be saved. This idea is a reflection of John Calvin’s doctrine of “the perseverance of the saints,” which contradicts Paul’s clear teaching in *Romans*, and definitively in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (cf. Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1,11; 6:4-6). The last half of Romans 7:25 is actually a summary of verses 13-24, and Paul’s exclamation, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” at the beginning of verse 25, should be viewed parenthetically.

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to

Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.” (Romans 7:4)

QUESTIONS

1. How does the marriage bond illustrate the relationship of a citizen to “law”?
2. In view of the preceding question, why is the Christian not bound by the Law of Moses?
3. What is the specific body of law referred to in Romans 7:4-7?
4. From what “Law” have we been “released”?
5. Without law there can be no breaking of law. Does this mean that the Law of Moses is evil?
6. According to verse 13, what purpose does the Law serve?
7. In chapter 7, Paul presents himself as a type of the person who is laboring to find salvation under the law. Does he find it possible to obtain peace in that situation?
8. The word “law” in verse 21 seems to indicate a “general rule” or “principle.” What is this “principle” of which he speaks?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. How does a “law” or a “rule” provoke disobedience?
2. Does the Bible teach that a saved person cannot sin so as to be lost?
3. Can a Christian ever mature to the point when he will not at times have to struggle against sin?
4. Describe the “unconverted” sinner whose heart is “set on the things of the flesh.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAJOR CONTENTS: Christ did for us what the Law could not do, freeing us from “the law of sin and death,” and fulfilling for us the Law’s “requirement” of perfect law keeping; the Christian’s participation involves setting his mind on the Spirit and following the lead of the Holy Spirit, who “helps our weakness” and intercedes for us; with Christ at our side, we are invincible.

The principal theme of chapter eight is that there is no condemnation for the person in Christ who is “led by the Spirit” (8:1-39). The chapter may be divided into four subtopics: **(1)** Jesus condemned sin while in the flesh and died for sinners (8:1-4); **(2)** Pardon and freedom are for those who walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh (8:5-13); **(3)** Those who are led by the Spirit are children of God (8:14-23); **(4)** Blessings attend God’s children (8:24-39).

8:1-5 – This chapter celebrates the Christian’s victory over sin, while not denying that the struggle against sin is ongoing. The Christian, freed from sin, is also freed from condemnation (8:1). This does not happen because of man’s ability or merit. Man is still “weak” since he is still “flesh” (8:2), unable to obey the Law perfectly. Paul proclaims that “God did” through His Son what the Law could not do (8:3). Christ not only died as an offering for sin, but by His sinless life “in the flesh” He condemned sin. When Jesus took human form (Philippians 2:6-7), He “emptied Himself” completely of the rights and powers of divinity, without ceasing to be Deity (Colossians 2:9), thus making himself completely vulnerable to temptation (Hebrews 2:17-18). If Jesus was not “made like His brethren in all things,” He could not be said to be an example for us in our struggles against sin.

The Law condemns the sinner; it does not free the guilty. Only God, the Judge, can *acquit* or *pardon* the guilty. The principle, already set forth by Paul, that “the wages of sin is death” (6:23), is *set aside* by the Supreme Judge for “those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1-2). This, however, does not suggest that the Christian is at liberty to sin, or to do as he likes, for that would be *rebellion*, which God hates.

The Law of Moses required perfect obedience, which no one could accomplish. The sinner could not, therefore, save himself. But that which man *could not do* through perfect law keeping, *God did* for man, by “sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin” (8:3). Christ’s work was twofold: **(1)** In the first place, He lived the perfect life that the Law required of every man, and now credits the believer with His personal righteousness (4:3-5). Of course, no man is without sin (I John 1:8-10), but as God views His children through the prism of His Son, every Christian is considered to be perfect and without sin (Colossians 2:9-10; I Corinthians 1:30). Christ’s perfect life fulfills *the requirement of the Law* in us, “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:5). **(2)** In the second place, Christ’s death on our behalf constituted an offering for sin. The Law demanded the death of the sinner (6:23; Ezekiel 18:20), but how could the sinner be saved if he had to die because of his sin? God solved the problem by substituting His own Son’s life for that of the sinner. So,

“Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6), and by “one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

8:5-17 – Paul next discusses the relationship between the Christian and the Holy Spirit (8:5-17). The Christian’s victory over sin cannot be accomplished apart from the assistance of the Spirit of God. Indeed the Christian must “walk according to the Spirit” (8:4). To follow the Spirit’s guidance in life requires that one have his “mind set on the Spirit” (8:6). This is not done magically or mysteriously, but involves the willingness of the converted sinner to follow the teachings of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit dwells within us to the extent that his teachings inform and transform us. “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for *if you are living according to the flesh*, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are *putting to death the deeds of the body*, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (8:12-14).

8:18-23 – In verses 18-25 Paul points out the great worth of the Christian’s victory through Christ. **(1)** First of all, it is worth *suffering* for (8:18). Paul’s somewhat enigmatic mention of the “anxious longing of the creation” (8:19) suggests that “not only” do children of God “groan” within themselves as they “wait eagerly” for the ‘redemption of the body,’ the resurrection of the dead, but the creation itself “groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now” (8:19-22). A principal question, as we seek to understand Paul’s reference, is what he means by “creation”? Some say that “creation” refers to the human race in general, who although not Christians, still suffer horribly in many ways and long to be relieved of it. On the other hand, Paul seems to be referring to the physical creation which was “cursed” when Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:17-18). The language is to be construed figuratively. The natural “creation,” which is often convulsed by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and storms, is *personified* as of a suffering woman in childbirth (8:22), illustrating the suffering of God children that will at length be relieved (8:23).

8:23-25 – **(2)** Secondly, the Christian’s great victory is also worth *waiting* for (8:23-25). We possess this victory in promise; we struggle daily against a powerful adversary to preserve it; we fervently believe that someday we will see face to face Him for whom we eagerly wait (I John 3:2).

The final segment of this long chapter (8:26-39) is composed of three parts: **(1)** the Holy Spirit’s help in prayer (8:26-27); **(2)** God’s providential care for his children (8:28-30); **(3)** and the great love of Christ for His people (8:31-39).

8:26-27 – **(1)** Paul begins with a discussion of the Holy Spirit’s help in prayer (8:26-27). The Holy Spirit “helps” the suffering Christian who feels totally unable to cope with the problems he faces. We “groan within ourselves” (8:23), according to Paul, unable even to vocalize a prayer, not even knowing “how to pray as we should” (8:26), so the “Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (8:26). It is not the Spirit who “groans.” Rather it is the distressed child of God who, overwhelmed by

troubles, needs help! The Spirit translates to the Father the “groanings” which the anguished child of God cannot find the words to express (8:27).

8:28-30 – (2) The second part of the conclusion of chapter eight concerns God’s providential care over His children as they progress on their homeward journey (8:28-30). “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (8:28). Taken in its broadest sense, this statement seems to be filled with contradictions, because it is the experience of most Christians that “bad things also happen to *good* people,” and often with no obvious corresponding good outcome! Not only so, but many sincere persons understand, erroneously, that *whatever happens is “God’s will,”* and that since He “causes all things to work together for good” for the Christian, everything will eventually work out right! But not everything that happens is “God’s will.” Satan is also at work! Since Jesus tells us to pray that God’s will might be “done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), it is obvious that it is not so at present! It seems, then, that Paul’s statement must be restricted to the *redemptive process as it relates to God’s “purpose”* (8:28). God purposed the church even before the world was created (Ephesians 1:4), and it was His purpose that those who would be part of this church would also become “conformed to the image of His Son” (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18 – 4:6). He then *called* men to come to Him through the gospel of Christ (cf. Matthew 11:28-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). He *justified* those who came, through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross (Romans 3:24), and, in His own mind, He has *glorified* them (8:30), since He can see future events as having already happened. According to His eternal purpose, God “predestined” the church and brought it into existence at the appropriate time (Ephesians 1:1; 2:10; 3:8-11; Galatians 4:4-5). The individual members of the church were “called” by the preached gospel, and were added to the church by their faith (Romans 10:12-17; 11:20-24).

What is said about God’s providential care for present day Christians is also true of His care for the ancient saints and prophets encountered in the Old Testament. The Greek verb *proegno* (“foreknew”) is a past tense form of the present tense verb *proginosko*. The present tense participle form of this verb (*proginoskontes*) is used in Acts 26:5, and is translated, “since *they have known* about me.” I suggest, therefore, that instead of “those whom He foreknew” (Romans 8:29), Paul’s words could be translated “those whom He knew in the past,” or “those whom He formerly knew,” referring to faithful saints of the past, men and women of great faith, “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38), who “gained approval through their faith.” The writer of Hebrews affirms that those ancient believers, either before Moses or during the times of the Sinai Covenant, would not obtain their reward apart from believers under the New Covenant of the Messiah. He writes, “God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:40). Therefore, those saints of old received promises that were *not fulfilled* in their lifetime, but they believed that in God’s good time the fulfillment would come. Those whom God thus “foreknew” (*proegno*, 2 aorist active), those whom He “formerly knew,” were predestined to be “conformed to the image of His Son” in the same way as are present day believers.

8:31-39 – (3) The third part of the conclusion concerns the unfathomable love of Christ for His followers (8:31-39). Paul here proposes a series of questions which he then proceeds to answer.

“If God is for us, who is against us?” Obviously, according to Paul, if God was willing to give His Son on the cross for us, there is nothing He would not give us! (8:32).

“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” Paul here implies a legal charge in a courtroom. Of course, no charge against the believer can prevail, since God is the Judge and He is able to pardon and acquit (8:33).

“Who is the one who condemns?” No one will condemn the Christian, since Christ, our great defense attorney (I John 2:1-2), stands “at the right hand of God” and intercedes for us (8:34).

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” No one and nothing, no trouble, no circumstance, not even the sword of persecution could ever cause Christ to cease to love us, or cause us to cease to love Him. In all of these things, we “overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (8:37).

Paul ends the chapter with a soaring, poetic statement of his profound conviction and of our own:

*“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers,
nor height, nor depth,
nor any other created thing,
will be able to separate us from the love of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:38-39).*

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

QUESTIONS

1. For whom is there no condemnation?
2. What will the carnally minded receive?
3. What is the “requirement of the Law” that could not be “fulfilled in us” without the assistance of Jesus?
4. Who can be said to be “the sons of God”? (8:14)
5. How does the Spirit testify that we are children of God?
6. What does it mean to be saved “in hope”?
7. How does the Holy Spirit “help our weakness” as we pray? (8:26)
8. Does the Christian have anything to fear from this world?
9. Can anything separate us from Christ’s love?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Discuss what is meant to have one’s “mind set on the flesh” or “set on the Spirit”?
2. What impact does this truth have on your life?
3. Why should prayer become a more meaningful exercise when one understands that the Holy Spirit is one’s “prayer partner”?
4. Explain Paul’s use of “predestination” in accord with the Biblical doctrine of free will?

CHAPTER NINE

MAJOR CONTENTS: Paul greatly desired the salvation of Israel; God’s word to Israel has not failed, nor has God reneged on his promises; God always intended to save both Gentiles and Jews on the same basis of faith; God has the right to choose and to accept the Gentiles; when the Jews refuse to accept Jesus as the Christ, they reject the justification which He offers them.

The next three chapters address the problem (for the Jews) of the inclusion of the Gentiles as “descendants” of Abraham. When we remember that many of the first converts to Christianity were Jews, especially before Paul became the “apostle to the Gentiles,” we can understand their need for teaching on this subject. Before they came to a more perfect understanding of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism, many of the Jewish converts no doubt felt that some principal beliefs of Judaism – such as circumcision, dietetic rules, and Sabbath days – remained valid and would continue in the church. Many of them, therefore, felt that Gentile converts to Christianity would be expected to accept these practices. This seems particularly apparent in Romans 14.

9:1-5 – Paul begins this section by expressing his great sorrow that Israel had largely rejected Christ. As already noted in chapter 3, Israel had several great “advantages,” which Paul here enumerates (9:4-5). **(1)** Because they were descendants of Israel, they were God’s “sons” by adoption. **(2)** The “glory” (*doxa*) was theirs. The “glory” here refers to the blinding brightness of the **Shekinah** between the cherubim when Jehovah was present in the Holy of Holies (Numbers 16:19; Leviticus 9:6, 23). From a word meaning “to dwell” or “a dwelling,” the “Shekinah” is also referred to in the New Testament as “the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) and “the mercy seat” (Hebrews 9:5). **(3)** The covenants, including those made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the covenant made through Moses, had special meaning for the Jews. **(4)** The Law and **(5)** the temple service were Jewish institutions. **(6)** The promises, beginning with those made to Abraham and extending to the Messianic promises, were precious to the Jews. **(7)** The “fathers” from whom the Christ descended according to the flesh” (9:4-5) were of the tribe of Judah. However, in spite of so many valuable advantages, Israel still rejected the Christ!

9:6-8 – Some might, therefore, wonder if the rejection of Christ by the Jews implies that “the word of God has failed” (9:6). Paul argues that God kept His word, and that what He said would happen did happen. Paul’s argument is that *the term “Israel” includes more than just the fleshly descendants of Abraham.* The ability to trace one’s lineage back to Jacob does not make a person “*of Israel.*” Paul had already argued in Romans 2:28-29 that “he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” Because “the children of the promise are regarded as descendants,” Gentiles who confess Christ are, by faith, “children of the promise” (9:8).

9:7-18 – The contention by some Jewish Christians that God’s promises to Israel should be considered to have “failed” if He accepted Gentiles on the same basis as Jews would seem to imply that, somehow, God is *restricted in His power*. Paul argues, however, that God is sovereign and that He has always has the authority to make choices! Paul cites several Old Testament cases which illustrate God’s right to choose (9:10-18). **(1)** He chose Isaac over Ishmael (9:7) although the firstborn usually predominated, and **(2)** Jacob over Esau, even before the twins were born (9:10-13), and nobody could say He was unjust in so doing (9:14). **(3)** He even used wicked Pharaoh through whom to work his will (9:17; Exodus 9:16)! He can show mercy on whom He desires, and He can “harden” whom He wills, and no man should dare to suggest that there is “injustice with God” concerning His choices (9:14).

9:19-20 – One final question might have been asked by Paul’s Jewish readers: “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” (9:19). In other words, Paul’s interlocutors are saying that if God decides *arbitrarily* whose hearts He hardens or whose He will not harden, how can He blame them when their hearts are hardened? Of course, the Bible student must understand, *a priori*, **(1)** that God does not practice partiality (Romans 2:11), and **(2)** that God created us as free moral agents, free to choose right or wrong. With this in mind, we understand that the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was not entirely God’s work. In fact, it is specifically stated that Pharaoh “hardened his [own] heart and did not listen” (Exodus 7:13; 8:15). And God said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go” (Exodus 7:14). God knew the heart of Pharaoh, and He knew how Pharaoh would react to His word. God does not arbitrarily harden anyone’s heart, but men react differently to God’s word, as someone wisely said, “The same sun that melts butter hardens clay.”

9:21-24 – Paul’s readers would be familiar with the potter’s craft, since most of them used the potter’s wares in their homes (Romans 9:21). Just as the potter could choose what vessel to make from any particular lump of clay, so God could choose. But, as in Jeremiah’s illustration (Jeremiah 18:1-6), *flaws* in the clay sometimes prevented the potter from making the beautiful vessel he intended to make, forcing him to create something of lesser value (Romans 9:21). Paul illustrates God’s right to choose. God recognized that wicked, hardhearted Pharaoh was “a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22), and used him to demonstrate His own power (Romans 9:22-23). He did so in order to demonstrate “the riches of His glory” upon *us*, “whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles” (Romans 9:24).

9:25-33 – Paul concludes the chapter by citing Scripture (Hosea 1:10; 2:23; Isaiah 1:9) to show that God *had always intended* to include Gentiles, along with the Jews, as His special people (9:25-33). With this in mind, Paul observes that the Gentiles, who were not really seeking righteousness, found it “by faith” (Romans 9:30), while fleshly Israel, attempting to earn salvation through perfect observation of the Law, failed to achieve it (Romans 9:31-32). This failure was due to their rejection of the Messiah (Romans 9:30).

MEMORY VERSE

“It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.” (Romans 9:8)

QUESTIONS

1. What was Paul's feeling toward the Jews who did not believe?
2. What advantages did the Israelites have over the Gentiles?
3. Explain Paul's statement that "They are not all Israel, who are descended from Israel"?
4. What two illustrations does Paul give to show that God had made similar decisions in the past, decisions which were accepted by the Jews?
5. What two prophets does Paul cite to prove that God had intended all along to accept Gentiles into the one body?
6. How did the Gentiles attain to righteousness?
7. In what did the Jews fail?
8. What is the stumbling stone to which Paul refers?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Explain the significance of the "potter and the clay" illustration.
2. How should we, as "priests" of God, approach the "mercy seat"?
3. Do we not occasionally, in times of anger or stress, "harden" our hearts?
4. Do we not sometimes feel, as we compare ourselves to others, that we are maybe of greater "worth" than they?

CHAPTER TEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: The Law pointed toward the Christ, and when He came, the Law was fulfilled and ended; those who receive the preached word of God, according to the gospel, will be saved; faith comes by hearing God's word.

In this chapter, Paul returns to the principal thesis of his argument expressed in 1:16-17 to demonstrate that faith, not perfect law keeping, is the basis upon which God will justify sinners.

10:1-2 – Paul never ceased to love his fellow countrymen. His “heart’s desire” was for their salvation (10:1), and he constantly prayed for them. He recognized that many Jews had a sincere “zeal for God,” but without a sufficient knowledge of God’s plan of redemption (10:2). Zeal without knowledge is not enough, yet too often those who promote error appear to be more zealous than those who know the truth.

10:3-4 – Rejecting the long-awaited Christ, Israel was attempting to become “righteous” through the keeping of the Law (10:3). Paul argues, however, that the Christ was the “end” of the Law (of Moses) “for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:3-4). The word “end” (Gk: *telos*) in this verse can mean either the “goal” or the “culmination” of the Law. Of course, at the same time that the Law reached its “goal” it also reached its “terminus” or end. The Law foresaw the Messiah, alluding often to His coming. In the first century, the Jews were in a period of heightened expectation of the appearance of the Messiah, but when He came they failed to recognize Him. By refusing to believe in Him, they effectively rejected God’s plan to make men righteous by faith.

10:4-13 – Paul cites portions of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to illustrate the difference between “faith” and “sight” (i.e. God’s way and man’s way). The Deuteronomy passage is not used by Paul as a “proof text” for his argument in *Romans*. The passage taken in its Deuteronomy context concerns the commandments contained in the Law of Moses, which are not “in the sky” (“heaven”) or “beyond the sea,” which would make it “difficult” to obey. Rather, these commandments are “very *near you*, in your mouth and in your heart,” which makes it *possible to observe*. Paul simply uses the words of Moses to *illustrate* that, in the same way, the “word of faith which we are preaching” is not *difficult* to receive and obey (10:8). In Paul’s application of the words of the Deuteronomy passage, we don’t have to traverse the heavens and “bring Christ down,” or go down “into the abyss” to “bring Christ up” from the grave in order to believe in Him. Real faith does not require such evidence! Paul says that God’s word is “near” you, reachable, easy to grasp. One must *believe* “in his heart” that Jesus was raised from the dead, and must *confess* “with his mouth” that Jesus is Lord. Based upon such faith, like that of Abraham, who believed without seeing (4:17-21), righteousness is credited.

The word “righteousness” (10:3, 10) must be understood to mean “justification” as in 1:16-17. The person who is forgiven of his sins will be saved (10:10). Again, referring to conclusions reached in the beginning of his argument (3:22), Paul stresses for

the final time in *Romans* that Jews and Gentiles are saved in the very same way: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (10:12).

“Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:13). To “call on the name of the Lord” is not a reference to prayer, but to obedience, including baptism in the name of Christ. Paul no doubt remembered often his own baptism, when Ananias had urged him, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, *calling on His name*” (Acts 21:16). Obedience in baptism was a part of the way in which Paul *called* on the name of the Lord.

10:14-17 – In 10:14-17, Paul emphasizes that God’s word must be *heard* before there can be faith: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (10:17). This fact eliminates babies, small children, and mentally impaired persons as subjects of conversion. And, just as faith cannot come without the “hearing” of God’s word, neither can one “call on Him in whom they have not believed” (10:14). Of course, “hearing” does not necessitate the *spoken* word, although Paul eloquently emphasizes the work of the preacher (10:14-16). The *written* word will also suffice. The point is, however, that the sinner must somehow *hear* and *respond* to the gospel; faith must be generated in his heart before he can “call” on the name of the Lord. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for *he who comes to God* must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

10:18-21 – As he concludes the argument of the chapter (10:18-21), Paul answers two possible questions that his Jewish readers might ask. The Greek grammatical construction indicates that the questioners expect a negative answer, an answer that would agree with them. These questions are fashioned in the same way as Judas’ question, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” (Matthew 26:25). Although the *expected* answer is “No,” Jesus said “Yes, it is you!” The two hypothetical questions suggested by Paul – **(1)** “Surely they have never heard, have they?” and **(2)** “Surely Israel did not know [i.e. “understand”], did they?” – expect a “No” answer, but Paul gives a resounding “Yes, they did hear! Yes, they did understand!” Paul then cites Isaiah’s complaint (10:16; Isaiah 53:1): “Lord, who has believed our report?” Unfortunately, although Israel did “hear” (10:18) God’s word, and did understand it (10:19), they obstinately rejected it (10:21). The Gentiles, on the other hand, “found” what Israel refused (10:20).

MEMORY VERSE

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

QUESTIONS

1. What was Paul's attitude toward fleshly Israel?
2. What could be said about Israel on the "plus" side? On the "negative" side?
3. How is Christ the "end" of the law? (Remember that "end" has more than one meaning.)
4. How does Moses describe the "righteousness which is of the law"?
5. How does Paul describe the "righteousness which is of faith"?
6. Are both faith and confession of faith necessary for salvation?
7. What does it mean to "call upon the name of the Lord?" (Cf. Acts 22:16.)
8. What must one hear in order to have proper faith?
9. By what means did God propose to "provoke the Jews to jealousy"?
10. How does God, by Isaiah, describe the Jewish nation?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What should be our attitude toward our own "countrymen" who have rejected Christ?
2. Is it possible that we also sometimes try to "establish our own righteousness"?
3. As we criticize others for not "hearing" and "obeying" the Gospel of Christ, do we ourselves fail to read and study God's word as we ought?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: Paul cites his own salvation as proof that God has not rejected His people Israel; a remnant has been saved by the grace of God; Israel's "stumbling" did not have as purpose their "fall"; their "stumbling" (i.e. "transgression," "failure," "rejection") served to open the door to the Gentiles who were more receptive; the analogy of the olive tree shows that Jews and Gentiles must be saved by faith; God has the right to show mercy on whom He wills.

11:1-6 – God's *inclusion* of Gentiles did not amount to a *rejection* of Israel. God has not rejected "Israel" (11:1). Paul offers himself as proof of this, since he himself was an Israelite (11:2). But God never promised to save "national" Israel. *Individuals* are saved, not *nations*. Paul could point to a "remnant" of Jews who were the objects of "God's gracious choice" (11:5). Since salvation is "by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works," and if salvation could be obtained through perfect law keeping, it would no longer be by grace (11:6).

11:7-10 – The Israel of Paul's day was like the Israel of old, unable to see or hear (11:7-8). Aware of this, Paul desired, at least, to "save *some* of them" (11:14). Although, theoretically and doctrinally, the nation of Israel was "seeking" the Messiah and His salvation, they rejected Him on the "heart" level (11:7). It is on the "heart" level that salvation can be obtained, as individuals, one by one. And on the "heart" level, Israel failed, being "hardened," unable to hear or see (11:7-10).

11:11-24 – Paul describes Israel's rejection of the Messiah with three similar expressions in 11:11-12. He uses the words "stumble," "transgression," and "failure." Paul writes, "They did not *stumble* so as to *fall*, did they?" To "stumble" is different from to "fall." The Greek conjunction *hina* (translated "so as to") introduces a subjunctive verb in a subordinate clause, indicating that the "stumbling" *did not have the purpose of* "falling," and Paul demonstrates that the "stumbling" could be remedied by belief. There was still a chance for the Jews to be converted. "Transgression" is the equivalent of "sin," which could be forgiven if they became converted. The "failure" of the Jews did not need to be permanent, as Paul says later in the same context: "If they do not continue in their unbelief, [they] will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (11:23).

Using an analogy, Paul demonstrates how God "grafted" Gentiles, as "wild" olive branches, into the stock of the "cultivated olive tree" (11:17-24). It is important here to note that the "cultivated olive tree" does not represent Judaism, but rather the people of God. Paul is adamant that Gentiles do not become Jews when they are converted (Galatians 2:14-16), but they do become true children of faithful Abraham (Romans 4:11-12). In his analogy of the olive tree, Paul points out that the Gentiles, individually, one by one, were "grafted in" by God when they believed (11:20). On the same basis of faith, Jews remained attached to God's people, but under a new covenant; Jews who rejected

Christ were “broken off” (11:20). Paul warns Gentiles who were “grafted in” that they had no reason to be arrogant or conceited, since “if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare” the Gentile Christian if he ceases to believe (11:21). And, if Jews who refuse to believe in the Christ should ever come to have faith in him, they “will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (11:20-23). Salvation depends on *faith* in Jesus and *faithfulness* to Jesus. *Individuals*, not *nations*, are saved by faith. Only *in this way* (Gr. *houtos*, 11:26), *by faith in Jesus Christ*, will Israel be saved. And this “faith” comes from “hearing” the preached message of the cross (I Corinthians 1:21-23; Romans 10:12-17). The usual and predominant “End Times” view of those who propagate premillennialism is that when Jesus appears in the sky, the living Jews *will see Him* and instantaneously believe and be saved – saved by *sight* and not by the preaching of the cross! When Paul wrote “and *so* all Israel will be saved” (11:26), he did not mean “*therefore* all Israel will be saved.” The word “so” translates the Greek *houtos*, which literally means “in this manner.” Having said this, Paul then cited Isaiah 59:20-21, a passage which referred to *the first coming* of Christ and to His death on the cross. At His first coming, Christ offered His blood for the “eternal redemption” of believers (Hebrews 9:12). This He did “once for all” (Gk: *hapax*); His redemptive offering will never be repeated. From that time on, every Jew or Gentile must seek salvation at the Cross! He bore the sins of mankind “once for all” at his *first* appearance (Hebrews 9:28); when He comes the *second* time, it will be to gather to himself “those who eagerly await Him” and to “deal retribution” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) to those who reject or disobey Him.

Why did Israel “stumble”? Paul says that by their “stumbling” salvation came to the Gentiles (11:11). But he has already clearly stated that it was *always* the will of God that Gentiles be included, along with Jews, in Abraham’s family of faith. When we remember that Paul’s missionary methods took him first to the synagogues, then to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected his preaching (Acts 13:44-47), we can understand his words in Romans 11:11. It was *never God’s will that the Jews should reject Christ*; they rejected Him because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 13:13-15). Calvinism teaches that God predestined these things, but neither Jesus nor the Apostles preached it so! When the Jews (in “part,” *most* of them) “stumbled,” salvation came to the Gentiles and “enriched” them (11:12). Now, says Paul, suppose what *would have been the case* if the *totality* (i.e. the “fullness,” Gr: *pleroma*) of the Jews had been converted! The NASB, appearing to lean toward the popular “End Times” point of view, translates the end of Romans 11:12 as follows: “How much more *will* their fulfillment *be!*” However, the KJV gives the literal, and correct, translation: “How much more their *fullness?*” The NASB injects the *future tense* into the verse, although *there is no verb* in the phrase, and translates *pleroma* as “fulfillment” instead of “fullness.” But Paul is contrasting what *is* with what *might have been*, instead of with what *will be*.

11:25-32 – Paul states that Israel’s “partial *hardening*” (11:25, NASB) created the opportunity for the entry of Gentiles into the family of God. That being true, the Gentile Christians in Rome should not be *arrogant* toward the Jews – “wise in your own estimation” – as it seems they were likely to be (11:18). Paul initially went to the Jews, but when the Jews almost unanimously repulsed him (Acts 13:44-52), he turned to the Gentiles. The “partial hardening” of the Jews does not mean that the whole nation of

Israel was “partially hardened,” but that *some* were “hardened” while *others were not*. Those who were “hardened” rejected Christ; those who were not “hardened” received Him. Paul’s clear teaching was that *individual* Jews would be saved, in the same manner as Gentiles, by the preaching of the gospel (10:12-15). This “partial hardening” of Israel would last “until the *fullness* (Gr: *pleroma*) of the Gentiles has come in” (11:25).

Paul affirms that Israel is “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (11:28), and that the door of mercy would still remain open for the Jews (11:30-32). Speaking of the Jewish people in general, Paul states that “the gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable*” (11:29, NASB). The NASB rendering of the Greek *ametameleta* as “irrevocable” is unfortunate and seems to favor the premillennial point of view as well as the Calvinistic teaching of predestination. The KJV rendering “without repentance,” though obscure, is to be preferred. The meaning of the verse, seen in context, appears to be that God *did not regret choosing Israel* as his special people, even though they proved to be disobedient. Of course, the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:3; Romans 2:28-29), as defined in the New Testament, includes believers from every nation.

11:33-36 –With a beautiful, heartfelt doxology, Paul concludes his great argument which began in 1:16.

*“Oh, the depth of the riches
both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable His ways!
For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?’
Or ‘who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?’
For from Him
and through Him
and to Him
are all things,
To Him be the glory forever
Amen.”
(11:33-36).*

NOTE: *The remainder of Paul’s epistle, in broad strokes, concerns the following: (1) the believer’s service to God and to the Christian community, and his interaction with others (12:1-21); (2) the believer’s acceptance of and his submission to civil authority (13:1-7); (3) some last minute reminders and injunctions concerning Christian conduct (13:8-14); (4) a discourse on how “opinions” should be handled (14:1 – 15:13); (5) a discussion of Paul’s evangelistic projects; (6) and salutations to friends and fellow workers.*

MEMORY VERSE

“Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue

in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.” (Romans 11:22-23)

QUESTIONS

1. What proof does Paul offer for his assertion that God did not abandon Israel when he allowed Gentiles to be saved by the Gospel?
2. Why did the majority of Israel not find salvation?
3. Did God want Israel’s “stumbling” to result in a complete fall?
4. What was one immediate result of Israel’s “stumbling”?
5. How can we show that Paul did not believe that every single Jew would be saved?
6. In Paul’s analogy of the olive tree, who is represented by the “natural branches” and the “wild branches”?
7. What is represented by the “grafting” process?
8. Why were the “natural branches” broken off?
9. Why were the “wild branches” grafted in?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Is it not a present danger for us today to accept the Gospel on an intellectual level yet “neglect” it on the “heart level”?
2. What is the difference between “faith” and “faithfulness”?
3. What did Jesus “bear” for us on the cross?
4. In the Greek original, the word “so” (11:26) means “in this manner.” With this understanding, explain Paul’s words: “And *so* all Israel shall be saved.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

MAJOR CONTENTS: In response to what God did through Christ, the saved believer must offer his body as a holy sacrifice; God gives to each believer “gifts” to use for the good of the congregation.

The Apostle to the Gentiles has concluded his great argument that began in Romans 1:16-17 and ends with 11:36. Sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike, are justified by faith, not by any meritorious works of their own, but because of the unfathomable grace of God. God credits the believer with a righteousness secured through the death of Jesus on the cross. It is appropriate at this point to follow with a section (12:1-15:14) which demonstrates how the justified believer should conduct himself before God and man.

12:1-2 – The word “therefore” (12:1) indicates that what follows may be viewed as a logical and practical conclusion to Paul’s great argument in the first eleven chapters. The first two verses (12:1-2) sum up the whole of the Christian’s moral and spiritual commitment in Christ; the remainder of the letter through the end of chapter 15 breaks down the two-verse summary, providing more specificity.

Paul urges Christians to present their bodies to God as living and holy sacrifices (12:1-2). Christians are spoken of as priests who bring to the altar, not the dead bodies of slain animals, but their own *living* bodies (12:1). Paul calls this action a truly spiritual “service of *worship*” that is acceptable to God. The Greek *latreia* is translated “service” (KJV) and “service of worship” (NASV), and refers to the priestly service in the temple, as in Hebrews 9:1 (“divine worship” or “divine service”). The KJV calls this “your *reasonable* service,” where the NASB says “*spiritual*.” Paul’s idea seems to be that this offering of our bodies is a “rational,” thoughtful action. It is as far removed from the rigid ritualism of the Law as it is from the frenetic emotionalism of the Greek “mystery religions.”

Christians are not to be “conformed” to the evil and corrupt society in which they live, but rather to be “transformed” (12:2). Paul uses the verb form of the Greek word for “metamorphosis” (*metamorphoo*). To the Corinthians, he will later write that as Christians gaze upon the glorious face of Christ, they are progressively “transformed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ shines in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 4:8). The “transformation” into the “image” of Christ results from the “renewing of the mind” of the repentant, obedient sinner (Romans 12:2), with the result that he “proves” that God’s will is “good and acceptable and perfect.” One does not “prove” the will of God by logical argument; rather, Paul’s word *dokimadzo* (to “prove”) indicates that when a person *tests* God’s directions through *active use*, he *demonstrates* that it is indeed “good and acceptable and perfect.” When Christians faithfully practice God’s will in their lives, they can see that it is the only way to true happiness and peace.

12:3-5 – In the remainder of chapter twelve, Paul discusses specific ways through which the Christian may “prove” or *test* the perfection of God’s will (Romans 12:3-21).

He speaks of different “grace gifts” (*charismata*) which God has allotted to individual Christians. As individual members of the body of Christ, we may not all have the same “gifts” or “functions” (12:4-5). Therefore, we should be careful not to think of ourselves “more highly” than we ought to think (12:3). The expression “measure of faith” (12:3) corresponds with “*gifts that differ* according to the grace given to us” (12:6), and should be understood as relating to the *strength* of an individual’s *belief* or *trust*. God has allotted certain talents to each individual, *gifts* which have nothing to do with miraculous “gifts” (as in I Corinthians 12:4ff).

12:6-8 – These talents include the following: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy (12:6-8). While “prophecy” does, in some contexts, imply that one is speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, the context in Romans 12 does not demand this. In fact, none of the other “gifts” appear to be of that sort. **(1)** “*Prophecy*” here appears to relate to one’s native ability to effectively proclaim God’s word. **(2)** “*Serving*” includes any kind of service. **(3)** “*Teaching*” implies learning and skill in communication. **(4)** “*Exhortation*” denotes the ability to comfort the distressed. **(5)** “*Giving*” implies abundance and a desire to help others. **(6)** “*Leadership*” implies assurance, intelligence, and ability to direct. **(7)** “*Showing mercy*” implies a kind and sympathetic heart. Paul urges every member to use to the uttermost his or her special ability. Each Christian should thoughtfully examine himself to discover such special talents and seek to use them for God.

12:9-13 – Paul follows with a rapid fire succession of exhortations regarding the Christian’s conduct toward his fellow Christians.

12:14-21 – Romans 12:14-21 concludes the chapter with several exhortations regarding the believer’s response to persons who may indeed be seeking his hurt! Several of these exhortations recall the words of Christ in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7). **(1)** The believer is to “bless those who persecute” him (12:14; Matthew 5:43-44). **(2)** He is told to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (12:15; Matthew 7:12). **(3)** He is never to return evil for evil (12:17; Matthew 5:38-41). **(4)** He is to “be at peace with all men” insofar as it depends upon him (12:17-18; Matthew 5:9). **(5)** He is to “feed” or quench the thirst of his enemy, leaving vengeance to God (12:19-20), overcoming evil with good (12:21).

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” (Romans 12:1)

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of sacrifice does God want us to offer?
2. How are we to become “transformed”?
3. What kind of opinion should a Christian have of himself?
4. In what manner should a person perform whatever ministry may be his?
5. What does it mean to “prefer one another in honor”?
6. Does any verse here remind you of the “Sermon on the Mount”?
7. How are we to regard the poor, or those of lesser “rank” than we?
8. Is it always possible to live in peace with other people?
9. How should we react when others do us wrong?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. In what sense is every Christian a “priest” of God?
2. What are some “offerings” that we can and should present to God in His temple?
3. What special “gifts” has God supplied to you that may be used in His service?
4. Explain Paul’s analogy of the “one body” and the “many members.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: Believers must submit to civil laws for conscience' sake; love does no wrong to a neighbor; love is the fulfillment of the Law; because the night is almost gone, Christians must "behave properly," clothing themselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, making "no provision" for the lusts of the flesh.

Chapter 13 divides into three sections: (1) the Christian's attitude toward civil government (13:1-7); (2) the Christian's attitude of love for all men (13:8-10); (3) a reminder of how the Christian should conduct himself in view of the rapid passing of time (13:11-14).

13:1-7 – It is not surprising that Paul should address the Christian's attitude toward civil government. This epistle was likely written in 57 A.D. and Nero, one of the most vicious of the Roman emperors, was ruling at the time. When Nero became emperor of Rome, the Roman Senate proclaimed him to be "divine," a god to be worshiped along with a multitude of other pagan deities. In addition, only seven or eight years earlier (49 or 50 A.D.), Emperor Claudius, Nero's stepfather, had banished the Jews, including some Christians, from Rome (Acts 18:2). We can be sure that the Christian community in Rome remained somewhat anxious about their status.

Furthermore, Christians would naturally have been concerned whether they could in any manner support a government which institutionalized idolatry and immorality as the state religion. But Paul maintained that God is the source of government and that Christians should submit to lawful civil authority. His point with regard to government seems to be that government *preserves order*, which is much to be preferred to *anarchy and disorder*.

Paul's statement that "every" Christian must submit to civil government (13:1) does not suggest that Christians should *approve* of what the civil government does. Although some Bible students have suggested that Paul's words here do not grant *permission* for Christians to participate as elected officials in civil government, or even to vote in elections, Paul does not directly address such questions. Neither does he say anything negative about Nero, the current ruler, or about any of the Roman gods or goddesses, perhaps because such statements would likely have spurred further persecution against the Christians. Rather, he reminds believers that those who "resist authority" bring "condemnation upon themselves" (13:2).

Generally, rulers do not repress or persecute "good behavior" (13:3), so Paul says, "Do what is good and you will have praise" from the government. Furthermore, the civil authority acts to some extent "as a minister of God" (13:4) as it brings "wrath on the one who practices evil." The Christian, however, should not do what is right simply to avoid paying fines or "getting caught" by the police! Instead, Paul insists that the Christian should submit to civil government, not out of fear, but for the sake of "conscience" (13:5).

Whether or not one agrees with the government, Paul teaches that one should pay what one owes, including the various taxes that are imposed by the government. Paul mentions two types of taxes: **(1)** an annual direct tax (Gr. *phoros*, “tribute,” KJV) on “houses, lands, and persons” and **(2)** indirect taxes (Gr. *telos*, “custom,” KJV) on other goods that one might purchase, as required of all citizens, even though these taxes might eventually be used to support Rome’s many wars or even her pagan religion.

Beyond the payment of taxes and submission to the law of the land, Paul leaves the individual Christian free to determine to what extent he should associate with civil government. In connection with this last idea, it is perhaps interesting to observe that neither the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1ff), nor the soldier/jailer of Philippi (Acts 16:22-40) seems to have resigned his military service following conversion. And it appears that Erastus, a convert of Corinth, was the “city treasurer,” a government employee (Romans 16:23). While it is historically correct to argue that the great majority of early Christians were opposed to participation in the military, Christian writers in the second and third centuries argued from both sides. Tertullian, a second century Christian pleaded with the government for fairness, on the premise that Christians filled all sorts of positions (excepting the pagan temples), including the military (Ferguson, 219-228).

13:8-10 – The second issue discussed by Paul in this chapter is that of “love” (13:8-10). While mentioning the commandments, first given by Moses at Sinai (Exodus 20:13-17), concerning adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting (13:8), Paul makes it clear that “love,” as a positive, active force, is what really keeps people from committing such acts. The Christian “owes” love to his neighbor (13:8). According to Paul, the entire body of commandments given by Moses is “summed up” in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (13:9). Love not only “does no *wrong* to a neighbor,” but it is a positive force that does *good* to everyone (13:10).

It seems important to note that when Paul says we must “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another,” he is not forbidding debt. This type of statement serves rather to emphasize the second element in the sentence, in this case “love.” Paul is actually saying, “Let your only outstanding debt be the debt of love” (Bruce, 226). This being true, however, it is equally important that the Christian should be careful to avoid acquiring debt that he would not be able to pay.

13:11-14 – In the third section of the chapter, Paul reminds the reader of the rapid passing of time. With each passing day, the believer’s “salvation” draws nearer; the “night” is almost gone and the dawn is rapidly approaching! These are evil times, Paul says, and the Christian must be careful to “behave properly,” not in “carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy” (13:13).

Although some suggest that Paul’s words indicate that he believed the Second Coming to be imminent, other statements by Paul show this view to be without basis (I Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff). The fact is that Paul did not know when the Second Coming would be, nor does any other mortal, although, through the centuries, many have made predictions, deceiving multitudes. Paul’s words should be

understood to mean that the Christian must conduct himself in such a way as to be ready whenever Christ should come, whether in his lifetime or later.

MEMORY VERSE

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.” (Romans 13:1)

QUESTIONS

1. In what way is the civil government a “minister of God”?
2. Does this passage authorize the government to take the life of the evil doer?
3. For what two reasons must the Christian be subject to civil authorities?
4. Should the Christian pay taxes?
5. In what should Christians consider themselves to be in debt to one another?
6. What commandment includes all the others?
7. Why is it time to awake from our spiritual sleep?
8. Paul mentions “putting on” of two things. What relationship do these two things have to each other?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. How does the Christian balance submission to authority with objections regarding civil leadership?
2. What kinds of difficulties does a Christian meet in an elective position?
3. May a Christian object to paying taxes on a purely moral basis (because, perhaps, some of these taxes may go for procedures the Christian objects to)?
4. What about the idea that the Christian must be “in the world” but not “of the world”?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: Christians should accept one another, and refrain from passing judgment on each other; one must not destroy the work of God for the sake of an opinion; one should have good reasons for whatever he believes, without forcing his opinions on others.

Although nothing specific is said in the *Acts of the Apostles* to confirm it, it is quite obvious that heads must have been wagging in disbelief when news of the missionary efforts in Southern Galatia reached Jerusalem! Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, aided by the well-respected Barnabas, was actually preaching to, and baptizing, Gentiles! And the missionaries were not even circumcising them (Acts 14:27-28)! Obviously, something would have to be done to correct that situation, so several zealous Jews left for Antioch to properly instruct the Gentile brethren (Acts 15:1). This caused a “great dissension and debate” among these new believers, occasioning what we call “the Jerusalem conference” concerning the potentially divisive problem (Acts 15:2-29). During that meeting, numerous men took the floor to speak, notably Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James (the Lord’s brother). The outcome of the conference was that an official letter was written and sent out to all the churches in an attempt to end the discussion and forestall any further problems (Acts 15:19-29).

14:1-14 – Romans 14 addresses the Jew/Gentile problem that seems also to have existed in the Roman churches as it did in the churches of Corinth (cf. I Corinthians 8) and Galatia (cf. Galatians 5). In spite of the earlier letter from the Jerusalem Conference, many Jewish Christians, steeped in their traditions regarding special days and “unclean” foods, found it very difficult to accept as equals the converts from among the Gentiles (14:3-6). On the other hand, the Gentile converts, eating all kinds of meats forbidden by the Law of Moses, felt despised (14:3, 10) by their Jewish brothers. Without saying that one was right and the other wrong, Paul urged each camp to walk “according to love” (14:15) and to “pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (14:19).

Paul’s concluding statement to the first half of this chapter makes clear what his ideas were: “*Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean*” (14:13-14). It is a matter of understanding and a matter of one’s own conscience. If one thinks something is “unclean,” to him it is unclean, but if one thinks it is “clean,” to him it is clean! But Christians follow a higher law, that of love. If one loves his brother, he will not flaunt his ideas before his brother. Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians concerning the eating of “things sacrifice to idols” (I Corinthians 8:9-10): “*But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?*” Paul was certainly not saying that it was acceptable to “dine in an idol’s temple,” but he was stressing that what one ate there was not “unclean” unless one

believed it to be so. Again, to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: “*If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’s sake.*” But, Paul adds that if other believers are present, one must be careful not to do or eat something that *the other brothers* may think is “unclean” (I Corinthians 10:27-32). “My freedom,” says Paul, is indeed limited by the conscience of my brother in Christ. Paul is not arguing, however, that the “weaker” brother’s conscience should be allowed to become the dominant voice in church polity, thus governing everything the church does, and limiting everyone’s freedom to exercise his own conscience. He is arguing that many problems can be resolved when Christians follow the law of love. He concludes, “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (I Corinthians 10:32).

14:15-19 – Paul’s call for a lifestyle “according to love” (Romans 14:15) was addressed to his Gentile readers as much as to the Jews. It might appear that some Gentile believers were insisting on their “right” to eat whatever pleased them! “Too bad for you if you don’t like it,” they may have been saying! Paul’s response to this attitude was, “If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil” (14:15-16). After all, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). Paul says, “So then, we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (14:19, NASB).

It is obvious to the modern reader that the Jewish converts were *sincere* in their attachment to the culinary laws of the Old Testament. After all, God had given them those laws and they had observed them all of their lives. Now they were being required to commune and eat with Gentiles who ate almost anything and who did not prepare their food according to Jewish tradition! Although we, today, understand that the Law of Moses is no longer in force, how would the Jews of Rome, less than thirty years after the death of Christ, and *without the benefit of any apostolic visit or epistle*, know how to deal with this problem? Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, therefore, broke new ground for many, if not for most, of the Jewish believers in Rome.

We try to apply, in modern times, Paul’s teachings in this chapter, and find that we have little in common with what he here describes. Instead of observing special “days” and eating or refusing to eat certain “foods,” the “opinions” that tend to cause problems and divide us are more likely to be different interpretations of Bible verses or words. Because of a natural tendency to qualify as “truth” one’s own interpretations, and to accuse as “false teachers” those who do not accept our “truth,” controversies and divisions have at times multiplied. Many congregations have been fragmented because someone has discovered some “truth” which no one else knew!

14:20-22 – We must, therefore, be careful not to “tear down the work of God”) for the sake of an “opinion” (14:20). Paul says that we are certainly entitled to hold “opinions,” but that we must not allow these personal “opinions” to destroy God’s work. He urges, “The faith which you have, have as *your own* conviction before God” (14:22),

but don't try to force it on others! The word "faith" in verse 22 means "a thing believed by you," your *opinion*. But, how do I know if my "opinion" is only an "opinion" and nothing more? In the first place, if it is indeed a "truth," then I should be able to *show from God's word* that it is! But if I discover that I am the only one who believes my "truth," then I should be a little hesitant before disseminating it or insisting on it. Furthermore, not everything that is "true" is helpful! Paul's principle is important: "All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and *gives offense*" (12:20). In other words, what I believe may indeed be *true*, but it may also be *destructive* and *divisive*. So maybe I should just keep my opinion to myself before God (14:22).

14:23 – The concluding words of this chapter, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (14:23), have been misused in various ways, mostly because of a misunderstanding of the word "faith." As stated above, the word "faith" in 14:22-23 does not refer to faith in Jesus or to "saving faith." It simply means one's *belief* or "opinion." Keeping our remarks within the present context, we understand that Paul simply means that when a person does anything contrary to his *convictions* he sins. For example, one person may eat food that he personally believes to be "unclean," and in so doing transgresses his conscience. To transgress or to do something that one believes is wrong is to commit sin, and will thus bring "condemnation" (14:22). Paul's statement is abused, however, when one goes *outside the context* and uses the word "faith" as a synonym for "the gospel" or in the sense of "the faith" as in Jude 3, where we are told to "contend earnestly for *the faith* which was once for all handed down to the saints." Edgar J. Goodspeed translates 14:23 in this way: "But the man who has *misgivings* about eating, and then eats, is thereby condemned, for he is not *following his convictions*, and anything that does not rest on *conviction is wrong*." Hugo McCord's translation reads: "The one who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he lacks conviction*; and everything which is not of *conviction* is sin."

Also of concern is the translation of the Greek verb *katakekritai*, from *katakrino*, which has a variety of meanings such as "to give judgment against," "to judge worthy of punishment," or "to condemn" (Thayer). *Katakekritai* is used in Hebrews 11:7 where it is said that Noah, by his actions "condemned" the world, meaning that Noah's righteous act rendered the world's "wickedness the more evident and censurable" (Thayer). Vine suggests that the action described in Romans 14:23 should be *judged* or *censured* as if it were a "crime" (Vine, 224). I suggest that the words "damned" (KJV), and "condemned" (NASB, NIV), although technically correct, are *too harsh* as applied to the action contemplated in Romans 14:23, since these two words imply eternal punishment. Certainly, any transgression of conscience constitutes "sin" and is *censurable* and should be *reproved*. But surely the child of God, saved by the immeasurable goodness and grace of God, should not live in fear that he is but a step away from eternal condemnation. Furthermore, to imply that anyone could live without ever doing anything contrary to his conscience seems to imply perfectionism.

MEMORY VERSE

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

QUESTIONS

1. Who is the person described as being “weak in faith,” and what should be our attitude toward him?
2. What two illustrations does Paul give of matters where brethren should not condemn one another?
3. Which person is spoken of by Paul as being “weak in faith” – the one who “regards the day” or the one who thinks every day is equal?
4. Which person is spoken of as being “weak in faith” – the one who eats only vegetables or the one who eats anything?
5. Is there any food which should be considered unclean?
6. Who has the right to pass judgment on you and me?
7. In what does the kingdom of God consist?
8. What things should we “follow after” or “pursue”?
9. How could a person “condemn himself” in that which he approves?
10. What is the meaning of the phrase: “Whatever is not from faith is sin”?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. If you were participating in an evangelistic campaign in a foreign country, what would you do if invited to have a meal with a family and they served something totally unfamiliar to you?
2. What if they served you a glass of wine during a meal?
3. If you hold an opinion that you know differs from most others in the congregation, what should your attitude (and conduct) be regarding that opinion?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: The strong should tolerate the weaknesses of others, being willing to please others instead of self; Christians should praise God with one voice, and accept one another; Paul desires to present the Gentiles, during his planned visit to Jerusalem, as an acceptable offering to God; Paul desires to visit Rome on his way to Spain, following his visit to Jerusalem.

15:1-13 – Chapter 15 begins by restating the basic lesson of chapter 14: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification” (15:1-2). Paul cites Christ as the ultimate example of this kind of conduct: “Even Christ did not please Himself” (15:3). He then urges his readers to be “of the same mind with one another” (15:5), to glorify God “with one accord” and with “one voice” (15:6), and to “accept one another” even as Christ has accepted us (15:7). The Holy Scriptures, here referring only to the Old Testament, which Paul says were written for our instruction (15:4), are cited (15:9-13) to show Jewish Christians that God had always intended to include the Gentiles among His people.

15:14-21 – The second section of chapter 15 concerns Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles (15:14-21), in particular, the *collection* (I Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9) of money that the Gentile churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia had contributed for the poor saints of Jerusalem and Judea (15:26). As Paul was in Corinth when writing the Epistle to the Romans, he was fresh from his extended preaching tour in Macedonia, and was brimming with optimism from the love and zeal shown him by the poverty stricken Macedonian Christians, who had “begged” for the “favor” of participation in this collection. They had given, Paul stated, “not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:4-5). As Paul suggests, the Macedonian Christians, mostly Gentiles, felt some sense of “debt” to the Jews for their salvation, because Christ had come to them from the Jews. So, as they, Gentiles, had “shared” in the “spiritual things” of the Jews, they felt “indebted to minister to” the Jews in “material things” (Romans 15:27).

Paul also speaks of himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (15:16), using for “minister” the Greek word *leitourgon*. The same word is used in verse 27 of the *ministry* of the Gentiles to the Jews. By choosing this particular word, in conjunction with the present participle [*h*]ierourgounta, “ministering like a priest,” Paul indicated that, like a *priest*, he would present this collection to the Jewish people as a symbolic “*offering* of the Gentiles” (15:16). His desire was that the Christian community in Judea would accept it as such an offering. What a disappointment he must therefore have felt when, later, his offering would appear to be rejected by many even in the church (Acts 21:15-30). Paul was understandably proud of his successes among the Gentiles, but he would boast only of “what Christ has accomplished through me” (15:17-18).

15:22-29 – Accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (15:19), Paul had preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum, always seeking to preach only where

Christ was unknown. His guiding principle was “not to build on another man’s foundation” (15:20). Because the church had already been established in Rome, Paul’s missionary principle had kept him from going there to preach. But in Paul’s mind, since there was “no further place for me in these regions” (15:23), there was now no reason not to fulfill his long held ambition to preach also in Rome (15:22-23).

Paul was the ultimate missionary, always with his eyes on a still more distant land in need of Christ! Although he wanted very much to visit Rome and to “obtain some fruit” among them also (1:13), Paul’s eyes were fixed on Spain, and Rome was to be only a brief stop on the way. He expected that the Roman churches would assist him financially on his way to Spain (15:23-28). But now, he was heading for Jerusalem, intending to arrive there before Pentecost, less than three months away (Acts 20:3, 6, 16). In his present euphoric and optimistic state of mind, Paul planned to sail for Spain, via Rome, following what he felt would be a triumphal reception in Jerusalem (15:28-29). In spite of an ancient tradition of such a visit, we cannot be sure that Paul ever actually made it to Spain, but if he did, it would no doubt have been immediately following his release from his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31). A detailed study of Paul’s epistles to Timothy and Titus appears to support a fourth missionary journey following his release from prison in A.D. 62. This hypothetical journey could logically have taken Paul from Rome to Spain, then to Crete, where he left Titus (Titus 1:5), then to Ephesus, where he left Timothy (I Timothy 1:3), on to Macedonia via Troas, where he left his cloak, books, and “the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13-14), then finally on to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10), where he was likely arrested and conducted to a Roman prison where he penned *2 Timothy*, shortly before his execution (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Assured of the continual presence of God, Paul was the ultimate example of confidence. As I suggest above, if Paul had any doubts about his future, he did not express them in his letter to the Romans! He confidently wrote, “I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints” (15:25), and following that visit, “I will go by way of you to Spain” (15:28). He expected to come to Rome “in the fullness of the blessing of Christ” (15:29), and then to continue his missionary endeavors in Spain. Paul’s hope was that he would come to the Roman Christians “in joy” and “find refreshing rest” in their company (15:32), recalling his words in 1:11-12 about the “spiritual gift” which he hoped to impart.

15:30-33 – Although an optimist by nature, Paul was also a realist, and recognized that he had enemies in Jerusalem. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* written prior to the Jewish rebellion before the destruction of Jerusalem suggests that many Judean Christians were falling away from the faith (Hebrews 3:12-19; 6:4-6; 10:32-39). Therefore, being a fervent believer in prayer, Paul urged the Roman Christians to “strive” (Gr: *agonizomai*, to struggle, wrestle) “together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints” (15:30-31). It is unclear whether the “disobedient” in Judea were non-Christian Jews who hated Paul, or Christian Jews who opposed his association with Gentiles and his rumored rejection of Moses (Acts 21:-20-

21). It seems likely, however, that some “disobedient” believers may have been among his accusers in the temple on the day he was arrested (Acts 21:27-29).

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7)

QUESTIONS

1. What should the “strong” bear with?
2. Whom should we seek to please, and why?
3. For what purpose were the Scriptures written and preserved?
4. What does Paul pray that God will “fill” us with, or “grant” to us?
5. What was Paul’s “confidence” concerning the Roman Christians?
6. Where had Paul “fully preached” the gospel?
7. What was Paul’s guiding principle in mission work, and why had he been “hindered” from going to Rome?
8. Where did he hope to go after visiting Rome?
9. Where was he about to go, and why?
10. What did Paul beg the Roman Christians to pray for?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Should differences of “opinion” prevent Christians from worshipping God “with one voice”?
2. What should be our attitude toward “good works” that the congregation engages in?
3. How should the idea of “serving like a priest” impact our Christian service?
4. Should every Christian want to “obtain some fruit” wherever he/she goes?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MAJOR CONTENTS: Paul presents Phoebe to the Roman church; Paul greets numerous Christians in Rome whom he had already met in other circumstances; he cautions the Roman Christians against those who cause divisions; certain ones with Paul at Corinth send their greetings; Paul closes the epistle with a doxology.

16:1-2 – Paul begins this chapter by introducing Phoebe, a faithful sister in Christ and a “servant” of the Cenchræ church. Cenchræ was a seaport town located about six miles from Corinth, on the Saronic Gulf. It appears that the congregation there had sent Phoebe to Rome on some kind of errand, and Paul may have seized the opportunity to send his letter to the Roman church. He urges the church at Rome to help her in whatever way they could, for “she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well” (16:2). Paul refers to Phoebe as being a “*diakonon*” of the church at Cenchræ (16:1), which could be interpreted to be a “deaconess.” Those who would object to this idea usually argue that Paul’s directions to Timothy regarding “deacons” (I Timothy 3:8-13) only refer to men and that he gives no qualifications for “deaconesses.” Others respond, however, that since the Greek *gunaikas* can mean either “women” or “wives,” I Timothy 3:11 could be viewed to be such “qualifications” and need not be understood to refer to “wives” of elders. These “instructions,” joined with Paul’s qualifications for widows who are chosen to serve the “widows indeed” (I Timothy 5:9-10), may well be considered as qualifications for “deaconesses.” Indeed, the need for *female* “servants” in the church was as pressing as was the need for *male* “servants.” The fact that the Greek word “*diakonos*” was simply *borrowed*, and not *translated* into English, has somewhat skewed our understanding of what a “deacon” really is. Since women were not to be *leaders* (over the men) in the church, it has been held they could not be “deacons” either. But the deacon is pictured in the New Testament as a “servant,” not an “office holder” on a career path to the eldership.

16:3-16 – We next have a long list of greetings to specific friends and former fellow laborers in the cause of Christ (16:3-16). Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, Jewish believers, head the list. Expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius, they had arrived in Corinth shortly before Paul on his second mission journey (Acts 18:2-3). They, like Paul, were of the tentmaker trade, so they worked together with him. When Paul left Achaia for Syria, they sailed with him to Ephesus where they remained for a while, perhaps two or three years (Acts 18:18-28). When Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, the faithful couple were no longer there; perhaps they had returned to Rome. About three years later, from Corinth, Paul greets them in his Roman letter. He owed them a great debt of gratitude, since they had personally risked their lives for him (Romans 16:4). A congregation also met in their house (16:5).

Paul greets Epænetus, his first convert in Asia (16:5), and a woman named Mary, who had “worked hard” for the Roman Christians (16:6). He greets Andronicus and Junias, a Christian couple who were perhaps related to Paul. Converted even before Paul, they were well respected by the apostles. Where they were from, we do not know, but we do remember that Paul had relatives in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16). Maybe they had become

Christians in Judea. Several others are named: Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, and Apelles, and Aristobulus, all beloved in Christ (16:8-10). Paul then greets another of his kinsmen, Herodion, and those of the “household of Narcissus” (16:11). He greets two Christian ladies, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, perhaps twins, and Persis, another faithful sister who had “worked hard in the Lord” (16:12).

Paul greets Rufus and his mother (16:13). Rufus, he calls a “choice man in the Lord,” and implies that Rufus’s mother had also been like a mother to him. Some, including me, believe that this Rufus may well be the son of Simon of Cyrene, who had carried the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). It is interesting that John Mark, who was said to have written his gospel while in Rome, finds it necessary to identify this Simon as being “the father of Alexander and Rufus,” which would make little sense unless Alexander and Rufus were well known to the Roman Christian community. And though it is conjecture, it is certainly no stretch of the imagination to think that Simon of Cyrene would have wanted to know something more about this man whose cross he had helped to carry to Golgotha!

Paul then greets Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and “the brethren with them” (16:14). The last group he greets includes Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and “all the saints who are with them” (16:15).

He closes these greetings by urging them to “greet one another with a holy kiss,” emphasizing perhaps the word “holy.” To his personal greetings he adds greetings from all the “churches of Christ” (16:16).

16:17-20 – Paul issues a solemn warning about individuals who “cause dissensions and hindrances” contrary to the teaching which the Roman Christians had received. Paul counsels them to “keep your eye” on such persons, and to “turn away from them.” We cannot know who these divisive persons were, but it seems that Paul may have heard about them, hence the warning. Perhaps his comments in Romans 14:10-15 were directed toward these persons. Indeed, these individuals were “slaves of their passions” (16:18) and were attempting, with “smooth and flattering speech,” to cause the “unsuspecting” to accept their ideas. Paul wanted the faithful to be “wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil,” convinced that God would soon “crush Satan” under their feet (16:20). This last sentence seems to be a reference to the Messianic prophecy that Eve’s “seed” would “bruise” the “seed” of the serpent under His feet. Christians, through their holy lives, *continue* and *complete* Christ’s work on the cross (cf. Colossians 1:24).

16:21-23 – Following this, Paul adds greetings from others who are with him at the time of writing, especially Timothy and three others whom he refers to as “my kinsmen” (16:21). Paul’s secretary, Tertius, who actually wrote down the epistle, adds his own personal greetings (16:22), as well as Gaius, in whose home Paul was lodging. It is also fitting that Erastus, the treasurer of the city of Corinth, also greets the Roman church (16:23).

16:24 – The oldest and most reliable manuscripts omit verse 24, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Nevertheless, these are words used by Paul as he concludes other letters, for example those to the Corinthians.

16:25-27 – Paul concludes his lengthy epistle with a ringing hymn of praise, which reminds his readers that the gospel – the “mystery” – which he preached, had been revealed to him according to the commandment of God, and that this “mystery” has now been clearly set forth for mankind.

*“Now to Him who is able to establish you
According to my gospel
and the preaching of Jesus Christ,
according to the revelation of the mystery
which has been kept secret for long ages past,
but now is manifested,
and by the Scriptures of the prophets,
according to the commandment of the eternal God,
has been made known to all the nations,
leading to obedience of faith;
to the only wise God,
through Jesus Christ,
be the glory forever. Amen.”
(16:25-27).*

MEMORY VERSE

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.” (Romans 16:16)

QUESTIONS

1. Who is named as a “servant” of the church in Cenchrea and what did Paul ask the Romans to do for her?
2. Who had “risked” their necks for Paul?
3. Which persons named were considered by the apostles to be noteworthy or “outstanding”?
4. What person does Paul name as his “mother”?
5. What does Paul say we should do concerning divisive persons?
6. Under whose feet would Satan shortly be “crushed”?
7. Which persons are cited as Paul’s “kinsmen”?
8. Who actually penned the words of Paul’s epistle to the Romans?
9. Who is named as the treasurer of the city of Corinth?
10. Who was Paul’s “host” while at Corinth?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. With the understanding that women cannot serve as elders, is there any reason why qualified women should not be appointed to serve in certain defined areas?
2. How did women serve in the Roman churches?
3. How should the church deal with people who cause division?

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