

# The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK  
CHAPEL

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## Romans

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The Gospel in all Its Grace and Glory

Russ Kennedy

*Savoring the Supremacy of God*  
*Studying the Word of God*  
*Shaping the People of God*  
*Spreading the Gospel of God*



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# **Romans**

## ***The Gospel in All its Grace and Glory***

### **Introduction**

We need the gospel today. In the midst of a frightful defection from truth that leaves struggling souls with little Godward hope, we need the good news. This is what Romans is all about. Its subject is the gospel, God's good news about God and for fallen men and women, boys and girls.

What we need is the gospel embedded deeply in our souls like a rod of iron that strengthens our spiritual backs. It will hold us upright so that our faces will gaze on God and have enabling grace for salvation, sanctification and serving. So, we take up this study for the glory of God and good of His people.

Romans may well be the most written about book in the New Testament. Commentaries abound. Opinions and differences and shades of understanding run like scattering mice through their pages. The faithful expositor can easily be overwhelmed. To make matters worse, there has been a whole category of study, writing and preaching on Romans that has used words, phrases and sentences as theological springboards. The assumption is that Romans is primarily the *magnum opus* of Pauline theology. I have chosen to seek a different path. I have chosen to take large arcs of text whose words, sentences and paragraphs guide the trajectory of exposition along the path of Paul's purpose. So while there is a value in careful investigation of the leaves, stems and cell structures of the text, I am concerned that we follow the path of the Spirit's thought through the glorious forest of truth.

The theme of Romans is tethered to the opening and closing paragraphs. Paul is set apart for the gospel about Jesus Christ to bring about the obedience of faith among all the people groups. So all glory to the God who establishes believers by the gospel and by Jesus Christ preached among all the people groups leading to the obedience of faith. Then there will be ultimate glory displayed in the wisdom of God through Christ, forever.

We have Paul's main themes – the integrity of gospel committed to him and the solidarity of Jews and Gentiles in the covenant community. (Stott, *Romans*, p.36.) Therefore, the gospel is the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ to all people so that they will believe in an obeying way as the people of God together. Thus, we must learn the gospel (Ch 1-11) and we must live the gospel (Ch 12-16). Why? Because in it the wrath of God, the grace of God, the plan of God and the will of God are revealed through the good news about Jesus Christ.

So come with me, my beloved. Let us run among the mountains of the glory and grace of God on hind's feet in His high places. Let us drink deep of the gospel and be strong in grace. Let us follow the stream that flows through this book till it gathers in torrential power up the near well-spring of our gloriously satisfying Redeemer.

## *Outline*

### **Introduction: The *Centrality* of God in the Gospel 1:1-17**

### **Doctrine: We Must Learn the Gospel**

#### **The Gospel: Good News to a Sinful World**

**1:18-5:21**

- The Universality of Condemnation 1:18-3:20
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- The Blessedness of Justification 5:1-21

#### **The Gospel: Good News to a Struggling Believer 6:1-8:33**

- Freed from Sins' Enslaving Power 6:1-23
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#### **The Gospel: Good News from a Sovereign God 9:1-11:36**

- The Purposes of God in Election 9:1-33
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### **Duty: We Must Live the Gospel**

#### **The Gospel: God's Will for a Sanctified People**

**12:1-15:13**

- Our Relationships as the Covenant Community 12:1-21
- Our Responsibilities in the Already and Not Yet 13:1-14
- Our Responses in the Matters of Conscience 14:1-15:13

#### **The Gospel: God's Will for a Serving People**

**15:14-16:24**

- The Example of a Ministry of the Gospel 15:14-33
- The Exhortation to a Ministry of Grace 16:1-24

### **Conclusion: The *Glory* of God in the Gospel**

**16:25-27**



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# The Gospel: The Centrality of God

## Romans 1:1-17

<See Introduction>

**Introduction**

<Read Text>

This letter is from Paul, the slave and apostle of God to all the Christians at Rome, Jew and Gentile. He has been called to serve (v.1) and they have been called to salvation (v.6-7). He writes to begin the ministry with them that he intends to do among them when his upcoming trip takes him to Spain, through Jerusalem and Rome. He is on his way to Jerusalem to take the offering to the church there and to Spain to take the gospel where it has not yet been preached (Romans 15:22-33). He has longed to come to Rome, but has been providentially hindered.

He writes to address the division in the church that has fractured along the lines of the gospel. Outwardly, the division appears to be between Jew and Gentile. However, Paul sees the division as being rooted in wrong thinking about the good news of salvation and the good news of the unity of God's people.

As Paul develops his thesis, he sees Christ as *PREEMINENT* in the Gospel, the Gentiles as *PARTAKERS* of the Gospel and himself (Paul) as the *PREACHER* of the Gospel. In this we can see so clearly Paul's own life and ministry statement. He exists *by grace to proclaim to all the people groups, the centrality and supremacy of Christ in the gospel, so that the obedience of their faith magnifies and glorifies Christ, extending the kingdom and exalting His Name.*

The book of Romans is probably the finest illustration of Lloyd-Jones comment that preaching ought to be logic on fire. Let us then approach this with a measure of both: a fine attenuation to the flow and a deep appreciation of the fire.

## The Integrity of the Gospel

(v.1-7)

The opening paragraph highlights the integrity of the gospel. While it may be misunderstood, misrepresented and even outrightly denied, the gospel is truth. The gospel has been subject, both then and now, to being altered, aborted and abandoned. This is why we must, along with Paul, articulate it and affirm it. So, authenticity of the gospel is at stake.

### Flows from the Scripture

(v.1a)

The gospel flows from the Scripture. Yes, it is more clearly revealed on this side of the cross, but it does not come to us as a New Testament novelty. It flows out of the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. The good news is an exposition and explanation and application, not a discovery. There is a continuity with the Old as well as an unfolding in the New.

### Focuses on Christ

(v.1b-4)

The subject of the gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The gospel is about Jesus, who He is and what He has accomplished. Even here, the substance of the message concerning Christ is deeply connected to the Old Testament. The promises and prophecies of the Old Testament culminate in a person. The gospel is about Jesus.

Why is the gospel about Jesus? Because He is who God promised and He has accomplished what God planned. There is a wonderful couplet here:

- Was born a descendent of David in the sphere of the flesh
- Was declared the Son of God with power, in the sphere of the spirit by the resurrection from the dead

Here is the essence of the gospel.

Jesus is deity. He is God's Son.

He became a man. Not just any man. But a man born a descendant of David with all that entails. He is both a Jew and entitled to David's throne. So he was really human and in this world. He also was a part of the old order, the old covenant and the old creation, the flesh (not sinful, just material) as we are.

He died and rose again. He died when he did not deserve to for the sin of others. He was raised from the dead. His resurrection appoints Him the enthroned, crowned Son of God. His resurrection elevated Him to the throne of David in the heavenlies as is indicated in Psalm 2:7 and Acts 2:36; 10:42; 17:31. So He is the sum and substance of the new order, the new covenant and the new creation, the holy realm of the Spirit.

He is Jesus, the Messiah, our Sovereign Lord.

The incarnation marks Jesus as the promised Messiah and Redeemer, so the resurrection marks out Jesus as the exalted King and Ruler. So the gospel is about this unique person, who is both divine and human, humbled and exalted, the man, Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord who owns and rules our lives. (Stott, p.51). "The saving promises to the nation [of Israel] have become a reality in through the true Israel, Jesus the Messiah." (*Romans*, T. Schreiner, p.45).

The gospel is also about this person who stands between the old creation, old era, the limited people of God and the new creation, new era of the Spirit and the universal peo-

ple of God. His incarnation, his death and resurrection are also the good news that we can be delivered from the old and be brought into the new.

The gospel is also about this One who has been exalted to throne of God by the resurrection and at the ascension as the Lord over all. In Him we are invited to believe, to Him we are summoned to bow and with Him we may live, beginning now and forever.

## Foundational for God's People

(v.5-7)

The *SOURCE* of their authoritative ministry lies in God's enabling grace and appointed office. Jesus Christ has given them and they have received power and position to accomplish the mission of the resurrected Lord. God's people are founded upon the apostolic message and mission, which we have for us today, not in person, but in Scripture.

The primary *PURPOSE* of this message and mission is to be the instrument through which God's people believe in an obeying way. The gospel about Christ is intended to bring about obedience to Him by those who believe in Him. This theme will constantly unfold throughout the book. What is required in a relationship with God is obedience. And it cannot be a fleshly, legal based obedience. It must be real belief, genuine faith that has obedience as a component. Again, we are confronted with the fact that faith is believing God in an obeying way.

The marvelous *SCOPE* of the gospel is a calling together into the community of the King of all the people groups. So for Jews it is not a salvation that makes Jews of Gentiles. And for Gentiles, it is a rightful membership in full standing in the community.

The ultimate *GOAL* is to spread the fame and reputation of Christ. The gospel is good news about Jesus for the glory of Christ. So while the gospel is to mankind, it is about and for Christ. God's ultimate aim in all things is to glorify Himself and to make Himself the supreme object of satisfaction, to enjoy Himself. As one great preacher has written, "We should be *jealous* (as Scripture sometimes puts it) for the honour of His name – troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the hour and glory which are due to it. The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that is), but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Christ." (Stott, p.53).

The good news is the gospel of God, about Christ, according to Scripture, for the nations, unto obedience of faith for the sake of the Name.

## The Ministry of the Gospel

(v.8-15)

Paul has two clear purposes in this paragraph. He establishes a relationship with them. He sets forth both his desire to visit them and how that has been hindered. His absence from Rome is not a matter of personal concern but of providence. Further, he models how the integrity of the gospel shapes the ministry of the gospel. He endeavors to lay a blueprint by which he will actually minister through the book itself.

## In Its Priorities

(v.8-10)

The ministry of gospel is dependent on and empowered by prayer. It is evident from all of Paul's books that he was a man who prayed. No model of ministry then can be complete without prayer, God-ward and people-ward. Paul's prayers in his letters flow from his priorities in ministry.

His prayer is marked by its *REJOICING*. He is thankful that their faith is being announced all over the world. The gospel he proclaims is effective to save and sanctify people. That it changes lives ought to be a constant source of gladness and gratitude. Notice that his gratitude is two-fold: for them as believers and then for the good news of their faith widely spread. So the life changing power of the gospel is a priority.

His prayer is marked by its *REQUESTS*. He prays for them and for a ministry among them. His life of intense service focuses his prayer in the so far thwarted desires and plans to come. Verse 9 is critical to understanding why this is here at this point. He is serving God with all his might in the gospel. Since this is so, he is determined to minister to them and this letter serves that purpose until it can be face-to-face. Yet his determination is not presumption. His wants are still subject to God's will, not grudgingly, but gladly. So ministry in the gospel with all our might is a priority.

## In Its Involvement

(v.11-13)

Paul points to three impart aspects of his involvement and interaction with them in ministry.

He establishes a relationship bond (v.11). He longs to be with them. What he wants to accomplish among them in the gospel for the sake of the Name is a ministry of the heart.

He expects a reciprocal benefit (v.12). They will be established and he will be encouraged. There is mutual effect of sharing their faith and grace. He comes to them on an authoritative basis, but humbly desires that being with them will encourage him as well.

He expresses a resolved purpose (v.13). In spite of being unable to carry through with his plans, he is determined to minister to them. Here is an aspect of gospel ministry that we all must embrace with a sense of reality. We make our plans to accomplish our purposes, while we happily bow to the providences of God. This is part of believing God in an obeying way.

## In Its Motivation

(v.14-15)

These two sentences establish a very important connection for us. They help us to see how our duty and desire are to be related, how we respond to God's commands and calling.

Paul speaks first of his *DUTY* (v.14). Our translations tend to use the word, obligation. This is not some psychological or emotional debt that is to be paid, but a responsibility arising from his calling, his apostolic office. His calling from God places him in debt to those he has been sent to, whether they are considered culturally (Greek/Non-Greek) or intellectually (wise/ignorant). God has given him a stewardship of the gospel, entrusting him with its riches and treasures. But he is to be a conveyer of those treasures to others. It is not his to keep. Hence, his duty is a debt and an obligation.

His duty is his *DELIGHT* (v.15). Since he has this obligation, this debt, this duty connected to ministry, then he is eager for the opportunity. The NASB tries to capture the sense of the emphatic here, “as for myself.” We should hear this like this. “I have a responsibility and (not but) I am most certainly and emphatically eager, ready and willing to preach the gospel to you.” This is the Biblical pattern for us. If we understand the gospel, its power, purpose and priority, then our obligations in it are carried out grudgingly, but gladly. If this is not the case, what is required is *repentance*.

## **The Certainty of the Gospel**

**(v.16-17)**

Both in a negative and positive sense, Paul affirms his confidence in the gospel. His duty and delight in preaching gospel is grounded in the certainties of the gospel. He is eager to preach, not only because of his obligation to the people, but also because of his confidence in its power.

The perceptive comment has been made that it is of little use to assert that one is not ashamed if there is little temptation to be ashamed. (Stott, citing James Steward, p.60) All of us want to place our hesitancy in evangelism as a matter of fear. I would suggest that it is rare that the Bible does this. Our unwillingness to share the gospel may well be more the result of being ashamed and embarrassed about what the gospel says. Once again, we must repent and place our confidence in the gospel certainties.

## **As the Power of God for Salvation**

**(v.16)**

The power for salvation to those who believe is embedded in the gospel. People are saved when the gospel is preached because the gospel is both the message of what God has done to provide salvation and the means/method by which God communicates that salvation. These two elements are critical to our understanding of the power of God for salvation. The message must be clear. The gospel cannot be altered or abandoned or obscured without dire affects for our evangelism. The message of man’s sin and God’s salvation must be given so that what is heard is what God has done. And the method must be used. Our primary aim in evangelism is to thoroughly good news people. We must be so committed to the message and the method as God’s saving power that we become eager to carry out our responsibility.

## **As the Revelation of God’s Righteousness**

**(v.17)**

This theologically dense verse is the second thread of Paul’s theme. The reason he is not ashamed of the gospel is that God’s righteousness is revealed in it.

Many suggestions are given as to what each of these phrases mean. The diversity and ingenuity of the commentators is stunning and confusing. John Stott’s way of synthesizing this was quite persuasive to me.

The righteousness of God here is the character quality of God that actively moves on behalf of men and gives them a right standing with Him. Since this is the anchor for this theme, what is referred to here unfolds through the book and in the gospel. The gospel tells us that there is a just and righteous God before whom we must have a right standing. It also tells us how God can be just and still justify sinners. And the gospel tells us how sinners can receive that righteousness, that right standing before God. So the right-

eousness of God is an attribute (the way He is), and activity (He comes to our rescue) and an achievement (He bestows a right standing upon us). (Stott, pp. 61-63 for all of the above). Stott summarizes it this way, “The righteousness of God is God’s righteous initiative in putting sinners right with Himself, by bestowing on them a righteousness which is not their own, but His.

This righteousness is revealed, that is seen and secured only by faith. It appears that this from (or by) faith to faith is meant as an emphatic. This righteousness solely by faith is certainly a major burden of Paul in Romans.

The quote from Habakkuk 2:4 serves as both the foundation on which the certainty of the gospel rests and the framework for chapters 1-8. It is almost certain that the translation by the ESV is correct: He who is righteous by faith, shall live. The quote places the emphasis upon faith: faith is how righteousness is appropriated and how the community of faith lives. Paul then uses the word faith at least 25 times in chapters 1-4 and life only twice while using the word life 25 times in chapters 5-8 and faith only twice. So the ones who are righteous by faith, Romans 1-4, shall live by faith, Romans 5-8.

So the gospel is God’s power to save us and to give us a right standing before God in our salvation and in our sanctification. This is why we must not be ashamed of the gospel and why we must preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

## Conclusion

So the gospel is centered on God. It is God’s good news (v.1-7)) about Jesus Christ to be proclaimed to all so they will believe in an obeying way. It is God’s good news for and among God’s people, central to Biblical ministry, establishing its priorities, purposes and motivations (v.8-15). It is God’s good news about His saving power and revealed righteousness by faith alone to those who believe (v.16-17).

So, do you believe? Do you trust God? Will you believe and bow to the God today?

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# The Gospel: Good News to a Sinful World

## Romans 1:18-3:20

### Introduction

What do you think about the following quote from a popular, *evangelical*, pastor and radio teacher?

"What about those people who've never heard, who will not hear? What about them? You know what? I know two things, I know several things about God, these two I know for sure: He's absolutely perfect. Absolutely holy. Absolutely righteous. and absolutely just. And he is absolutely loving. You know what? That's a question I don't have to answer because nobody has the ultimate answer. Somebody could say, 'Well, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Correct. Would God send somebody (and this is the way it usually is said), would God send somebody to hell because they did not receive Jesus whom they never heard about, never had the privilege of knowing about? And my answer is: No, he would not." (Charles Stanley, *In Touch* program aired on July 31, 2001)

The good news or the bad news: which do you want first? Well, we are about to find that Charles Stanley is wrong and Romans 1-3 do give us the ultimate answer.

### Its Overarching Purpose

The *PURPOSE* of this long section is to declare how the wrath of God is revealed, to what extent, with what consequence and to dialog with objections. Our understanding of the condition of the lost, particularly, those groups of people whose condemnation is sometimes made an open question. The gospel does not propose some alternative way that certain groups of people are excused from sentence of God's condemnation and His just wrath. The good news comes in the face of universal and unequivocal condemnation.

### Its Logical Progression

Hear Paul's way of thinking about this: He has an apostolic obligation to preach the gospel that fuels his eagerness to preach. His eagerness to preach the gospel is grounded in his confidence in the gospel's power to save and its ability to reveal the righteousness of God. The gospel is universally and everywhere needed because man is universally and everywhere condemned. And all men everywhere live in the context of the universal revelation of the wrath of God.

### Its Repeated Pattern

The *PATTERN* followed in each section is identical. He addressed each category of people, and individually and corporately:

- Reminds of their knowledge of God and His goodness to them;
- Confronts them with the facts that they have not lived up to that knowledge or goodness shown;
- Pronounces them guilty as charged and subject to the just wrath of God.

## Its Literary Structure

Visualizes the structure of the text here, following its literary and grammatical components.

- |                    |   |  |        |
|--------------------|---|--|--------|
| ➤ Place of the Law | } | ➤ Portrayal of Universal Depravity     | “they” |
|                    |   | ➤ Diatribe against Moralists           | “you”  |
|                    |   | ➤ Diatribe against Jews                | “you”  |
|                    |   | ➤ Pronouncement of Universal Damnation | “we”   |

## Its Clear Indictment

Visualizes how Paul develops the indictment in terms of concentric circles of groups, revelation, responsibility and response.

PPT Slide

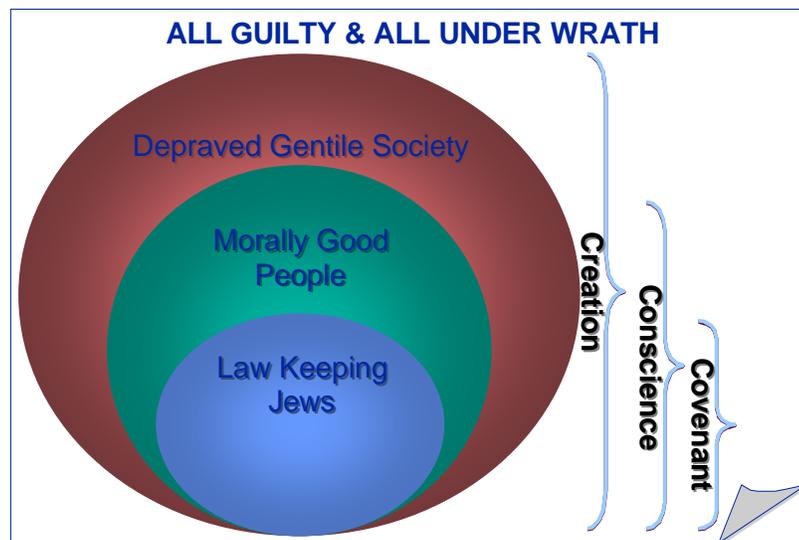


Figure 1 - The Indictment

- |                               |          |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| ➤ Gentile Depravity           | 1:18-32  |
| ➤ Self-Righteous Morality     | 2:1-16   |
| ➤ Jewish Legality             | 2:17-3:8 |
| ➤ Universality Accountability | 3:9-20   |

Let's now walk through this text in such a way that hearing the bad news causes us to long for and to embrace the good news.

## The Portrayal of Universal Depravity

(1:18-32)

The portrayal here is historical, cultural and personal. It traces the decline since creation, following the story line of the Bible in several places. It also is cultural as it explains the decline in culture after culture. And it is personal. Each of us who have lived sinful lives can see our lives in this text.

**Their Indictment****(v.18-20)**

Their indictment begins in the wrath of God being revealed against man's ungodliness and unrighteousness, against man's believing and acting as though God does not exist and without regard to God's law.

It is not that man is ignorant of God so that he has an excuse. Rather, man is actively resisting and rejecting what God has revealed. Since creation, God has shown Himself through what He has made. That revelation is clear and condemning. It is not sufficient to save, but is purposed to leave man without excuse. Creation declares the glorious greatness of God and our lowly and accountable place before Him. This is a fact of all the Bible. No one is excused. No one is exempt. Everyone lives in the environment of God's self-disclosure. Just because someone has their eyes shut doesn't mean the sun isn't shining.

**Their Idolatry****(v.21-25)**

The most fundamental thing about us is that we are made to worship. All human beings are serving someone or something. So, idolatry in the heart is at the heart of man's sinful condition. That idolatry involves two fundamental exchanges, or trades.

There is an exchange of the glory of God for an image, trading the greatness of the Creator for the greatness of the creation. This comes not out of ignorance, but turning a knowledge of God into futile and heart darkening myths while calling themselves wise.

The second exchange is in trading the truth of God for a lie. Having believed lies, God delivers them over to serve their lusts since they refuse to serve God. Thus they worship and serve what is made, rather than the Creator. They mistake that which reveals God for that which is God.

**Their Immorality****(v.26-27)**

Because of their idolatry, God hands them over to being enslaved by their passions leading to degrading practices. Their prideful idolatry lands them in perverted immorality. Man is normally restrained by God's common grace so that he does not become as evil in his conduct as he is in his nature. This is for the common good. But God can and does withdraw that common grace, giving man over then to the pursuit of whatever his evil and wicked heart can imagine.

It is evident from this text that lesbianism (v.26) and homosexuality (v.27) are evil, degrading passions and practices. They are not natural. They are an expression of rebellion against God and rejection of His order and design. Homosexuality then is a perversion of God's design and is sin. It is a great evil that always signals the collapse of a culture and the impending wrath of God. Why? Because it shows that there is no recognition of God and no regard for God's design. That form of immoral sin is evidence of utter blindness just to the simple facts of anatomy. But the good news that while homosexuality and lesbianism is condemned, in the church at Corinth were those rescued and redeemed from that sin.

## **Their Impenitence**

**(v.28-32)**

This is actually the initial withdrawal of God's common grace. It follows on an unwillingness to acknowledge God as God. Here is the giving over to what is translated as "a depraved mind". Commentators have struggled with this. They tend to do so because we are not well taught that our practice of sin is the fruit of our thinking. But for those who understand thinking as the root from which behaving grows, this makes all kinds of sense. God gives people over to a mind controlled by the sinful nature that yields in a conduct characterized by this laundry list of evil attitudes and actions.

Notice how this paragraph ends in verse 32. They know these things are wrong and have God's death sentence attached to them. Yet, they not only practice them with impunity, but give hearty encouragement to others who do as well. They move from refusing to acknowledge God to rejoicing in their evil to giving approval to others. If this does not describe our culture today, then nothing does. Most of the cultures we see today are either in this process of decline or the product of it.

Thus, Paul's portrayal describes an individual and cultural progression. This is not man moving upward, but sliding downward.

In the context of a clear, condemning but non-converting revelation by creation, man responded by suppression of that knowledge (v.18), speculating about the means of that knowledge (v.21) and substituting for the great Object of that knowledge (v.25). They did so from hearts that believed lies (v.25) and followed lusts (v.26). Thus they exchange the glory of God (v.23-24), the truth of God (v.25) and the design of God (v.26-27). This resulted, at each step, God giving them over to impurity (v.24), degradation (v.26) and depraved minds (v.28).

So, everyone, everywhere at all times sins in the presence of light. Sinning against that light renders them without excuse and subject to the wrath of God, beginning with their life here and culminating in eternity.

## **The Principle of Universal Law**

**(2:1-3:8)**

So, they have no excuse (1:20). Now, you have no excuse (2:1). Paul turns from the universal revelation of the wrath of God that condemns to the universal presence of the law that condemns. He turns from talking about them to talking to you, from the outer circle where we generally say we are not to one of the inner circles where we sit exposed for what we really are.

## **Condemning Self-Righteous Moralists**

**(2:1-16)**

In the face of our tendency to self-justification, Paul characterizes the judgment of God. Within the circle of critical, self-righteous moralists will be Gentiles like Seneca, Plato and Aristotle, as well as unbelieving conservatives of all ages like Rush Limbaugh. Also within that circle are Jews who are also self-righteous moralists.

## **It is Inescapable**

**(v.1-4)**

The fact that we pass judgment on the behavior of others is inescapable evidence that we understand there is right and wrong. It is also evidence that the source of that determination lies outside of ourselves. It betrays that we do not see the goodness and

kindness of God as leading us to inward and outward transformation, to repentance. The self-righteous moralist never sees himself as vulnerable and exposed to the wrath of God.

### **It is Inflexible**

**(v.5-8)**

The self-righteous moralist does not see that it is the inflexible and inescapable standards that are applied to the heart. So our very moralism functions as stubbornness and unrepentance. Yet the standard will not change. God will reward and punish, according to Psalm 62:12, on the basis of deeds. Do not let verses 7-8 shake you. Here is the standard: those who always (meaning without ever failing) do good will receive eternal life. Those who persist in doing evil (in both heart and action) will receive punishment. The problem is that no one meets the standard. Only one person has lived out the standard and this because He Himself is the embodiment of the standard, the Lord Jesus.

### **It is Impartial**

**(v.9-11)**

This standard will be applied without distinction to all by an impartial God. The moralist always sees himself as having a special standing in God's sight. Here, Paul levels the playing field. Even Jewish moralists are subject to God's wrath.

### **It is Inclusive**

**(v.12-16)**

It includes those who have the Law and those who do not. Those who have God's will in His Word will be judged by that Word. Those who do God's will without His Word will be judged by the conscience that allows or disallows. The argument comes to thundering conclusion here in verses 14-15. Everyone is subject to being indicted under law. The Jews have the law written in Scripture. The Gentiles have the law written on their hearts in their consciences. In the end, all will be judged according to the gospel; or as Paul puts it, "my gospel."

## **Condemning Religious Legalists**

**(2:17-3:8)**

The powerful progression of this indictment now moves against the religionist, the Jew who relied in his good works.

### **Who Defame the Honor of God**

**(v.17-24)**

Here they are with all their privileges and pride. For all their light, they do not illuminate God. Instead, they have obscured Him. The inconsistency between what they know, what they proclaim and how they live all serve to dishonor God. In the end, the Gentiles blaspheme instead of bowing to God.

The powerful indictment of the Jews and all religionists turns on verse 23. Those who boast in having the Scripture and who break the Scripture, dishonor God. How we who say we love God's Word must be careful to live God's Word unless we turn people away from God and His Word.

### **Who Focus on Externals**

**(v.25-29)**

Circumcision is an example of a religious rite that was supposed to symbolize a spiritual reality, not procure it. The Jews trusted that being circumcised established their relationship with God and gave that right standing so that they would be ac-

cepted. The problem was that disobedience to the rest of the Law undid the obedience to that one aspect of the Law.

In fact, even the Old Testament called for a circumcision of the heart. It is not a matter of externals, but issues of the heart. It is not, for example, that being baptized saves, but that those who believe and are saved, will be baptized. It is that the external obediences flow from a changed heart.

One other theme is being advanced here: the unity of the Jew and Gentile. Paul here defines who the true Jews were and are. Make no mistake that this is not just for now, but he reads this back into the Old Testament, as we will later see. A true Jew is one who has the inner work of the Spirit and is accepted and acknowledged by God. Thus, the Jew and Gentile are one on the grounds of God's inward and transforming work of the Spirit. The essential unity of Jews and Gentiles is in their common sinfulness and in their common salvation.

### **Who Hide behind Objections (3:1-8)**

Paul then confronts the Jewish objections to his way of presenting the gospel. He models for us how to do apologetics; that is, how we anticipate and answer objections to the gospel. In doing so, he lays the foundation for what will come in Romans 9-11. So I will deal with this section briefly and save the details for later. Paul's teaching so far invokes 4 distinct, but related objections. It undermines God's covenant (v.1-2). It nullifies God's faithfulness (v.3-4). It impugns God's justice (v.5-6). And it falsely promotes God's glory (v.7-8). Paul responds by pointing to their having the very Word of God, which they did not believe. But their unbelief does not nullify God's faithfulness and it invokes the justice of God. The last objection is simply dismissed as being absurd.

At the end of the day, Paul anticipates and responds to valid objections. But generally, sinners are just hiding behind them.

### **The Pronouncement of Universal Damnation (3:9-20)**

At the end of a trial, the lawyers bring what are called *The Closing Arguments*. Here they do their best to clinch the case. This is what we have here. The prosecuting attorney now closes the case.

#### **Summary Charge (v.9)**

Everyone is under the cruel and crushing weight of sin. We are all in bondage to it and enslaved under it and subject to its just penalty.

#### **Scriptural Proof (v.10-18)**

Since the gospel is promised and prophesied in the Old Testament, we should expect that the final pronouncement should rest solidly on an Scripture. And it does. Paul brings to the fore one of the longest Old Testament quotes in the New Testament. He does so by knitting together a fabric of description and denunciations calculated to close his case.

Stott points out that these Scriptures paint a grim picture of sin. It declares the ungodliness of sin, demonstrates the pervasiveness of sin and teaches the universality of sin. It

shows that sin has made man unable to please, seek or obey God. Verses 10-12 describes the total inability of man, the extent and power of his depravity. Verses 13-17 illustrates the immorality of man, the examples and patterns of his depravity. Verse 18 concludes with the underlying cause and effect: man does not fear God.

## Concluding Purpose

(v.19-20)

This final paragraph serves to conclude the charge. It points to the purpose of this long section and the function of the Scripture in that charge.

At the end of the day, the weight of the argument is meant to silence the sinner. There is nothing left to say. That is because everyone is being made accountable to God. It is not man's standard of righteousness and justice that is condemning, but it is God's righteous standard. And that standard is found in the Law. The Law was not given to save. The Law was given to expose sin. The works of Law are futile for salvation, yet is revelatory of our sin.

We stand charged before God and silenced before His righteous wrath. And the law cannot bring us forgiveness, it can only pronounce God's judgment. O, what will we do? How will we have a righteousness before God that He accepts and thus accepts us?

“Now a righteousness apart from the Law appears, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.” (Romans 3:21-22, Abridged)

It seems to me that there are two appropriate responses to this terrible denunciation on man's horrific, sinful plight. **Conclusion**

- We must cry out for mercy. We must see ourselves in all our sinfulness. It may be the sinfulness of a depraved pagan society. Or it may be the sinfulness of a critical moralist. Or it may be the sinfulness of a self-righteous religious legalist (whether Jew or Gentile). But we are all subject to the wrath of God. Every one of us. All are under sin. All are under judgment. All are subject to wrath. Your good works cannot save you. Your religion cannot save you. And frankly, having a personal relationship with God (whatever that means) cannot save you. Only having a right standing with God by believing in Jesus, our Redeemer and Ruler, can we be saved from the wrath to come. So repent and believe, today. Now.
- We must carry the gospel to the lost. If every one you meet, if your nice neighbor who borrows your sugar and cooks out with you; if your family – father, mother, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents; if the waitress at your favorite restaurant, the person in the cubicle by you or on the machine beside you; if the person who sits next to you on the plane, or even at church are all doomed under the wrath of God, then we must take them the gospel. Why? Because God is glorified when sinners bow and believe when saints proclaim and witness. Let all mouths be stopped before God and opened before men.



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# The Gospel: The Way of Justification

## Romans 3:21-4:25

Last week we heard the massive declaration of the universal and guilt of man and God's inescapable condemnation and wrath. We stand without excuse before a patient, sovereign and holy God without excuse for through everything He has made and in everyone He has made, He has revealed Himself.

### Introduction

What we have witnessed this week in the terrorist attacks on America simply underscores what the Bible has declared. Further, it is not just Osama Bin Laden and his henchmen who are guilty before God, but so are the morally good people who are sacrificing their lives to try to reach and rescue in the rubble. This is what is hard for us. We look at a weary fire-fighter who has been on for 24 hours and seen unspeakable horrors and we do not think to ourselves: if this man is not justified before God he will suffer the wrath of God.

How can so profoundly corrupt and justly condemned people have a righteous standing before God? This problem involves two great questions which are answered through this text.

- 1) How can God remain just and yet pronounce sinners not guilty and righteous before Him?
- 2) How can this righteousness be applied and appropriated?

## The Meaning of Justification

(3:21-26)

To be right before God is the heart of salvation. The doctrine of justification is just simply the answer given in the Bible to the terrible problem of sin. Sin separates us from God and calls down on our heads the wrath and condemnation of God.

Sin therefore has two important components: the moral component whereby we are corrupted and the legal component whereby we are condemned. Justification is primarily the work of God that deals with the legal, condemning component of sin. At the heart of what Paul is dealing with here is the confusion of these two elements. When people try to be justified by good works, they are functioning in the moral arena and are still condemned in the legal arena. *Doing good while sentenced to death will not excuse you from being condemned.*

This is why we believe that the doctrine of justification must continue to be upheld today against all forms of Catholic error. Catholicism (and all its cousins) confuse the legal and moral by insisting that justification is the infusing, imparting, placing into the person a principle of righteousness. Then we are accepted as not guilty based on the moral acts of righteousness we produce as a result. As we will see in Chapter 4-5, justification is a legal declaration of not guilty based on God's righteousness imputed to our account. So we have a righteousness apart from us and alien from us put on our account. Moral transformation is the work of sanctification: that is, faith working through love.

## Righteousness Revealed Now

(v.21)

But now, God's righteousness is manifested. A redemptive historical development is implied by the opening. As Thomas Schreiner wrote that this "marks the shift from the old era of sin's domination to the new era of salvation." (Schreiner, *Romans*, p.221). Fundamental to Paul and the Bible's structure of salvation is this change from the old to the new, the old era to the new era, the flesh to the spirit, from "then" to "but now". This is both in the larger picture of salvation history and in the personal application of individual salvation. At both the historical and personal levels, Christ crucified is the central event and theme.

Since the cross, God's righteousness has been made visible apart from a law principle. The Old Testament Scriptures witnessed to this event, the manifestation of God's righteousness at the cross. Since keeping the Law cannot bring us righteousness and since the function of the Law was to show us what sin is, then God's righteousness is made visible through the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Righteousness Centered on Christ

(v.22-25a)

I know that there is much to highlight and explain in these few verses. They are some of the most redemptively, theologically dense texts in the New Testament. But what stands out to me is the utter Christ-centeredness of this paragraph. Understanding our justification involves propositional statements, doctrines. Defending it against errors means thinking carefully about it as well. But hear me well. Without Jesus Christ we have no justification. Without Him as the center of the Father's delight and thus the Father's utter determination to glorify Himself in His Son; without His own righteousness and holiness as the reality of which the Law and Prophets are a description; without His sacrificial death, standing before and suffering the wrath of God for us; without His glorious resurrection and ascension and reception into heaven certifying that the work was complete and accepted; without JESUS CHRIST, we are doomed and damned.

So I will be fierce in my dedication of holding up my Redeemer and Ruler to be trusted, whose cross is the ground of my justification and who publicly displayed the righteousness of God.

This righteousness comes through *FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST* (v.22-23). Regardless of who we are and what we are, corrupt and condemned, we have a right standing before God through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is unmistakable: through faith in Christ by those who believe. Why is this so? Why no distinction? Why through faith and belief? Because everyone has fallen short of God's glory. Magnifying God is the ultimate standard. Some commentators want to place this "glory" as some form of God's image in which we were created. But I am prepared to say that the essence of sin is self-esteem instead of God esteem, that we seek and serve self instead of seeking and serving God. All have sinned and thus or in this way, fail to magnify God with every thought, desire and deed. I can't resist: this is why Paul is going to say in chapter 4 that Abraham did not waver but grew strong in faith and thus glorified God.

This righteousness comes to us as a *GIFT BY HIS GRACE* (v.24). By the sheer grace of God He simply gives us a right standing before Him, declaring us not guilty and placing His

own righteousness to our account. And it is a gift, totally undeserved and totally graciously bestowed.

This righteousness is *GROUNDED IN THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST* (v.24-25a). Two important terms are used to show us the cross. The cross is the grounds of the righteousness of those who believe because at the cross is redemption and propitiation. These two important terms will help us to see Jesus more clearly

- *REDEMPTION* – This word is used to describe the worth and work of Christ whose life paid for our freedom. We are pictured in the Bible as slaves, sold to sin. Jesus’s death purchased His people and set them free to be His won possession. The Bible is full of the use of this word and words like it point to what God has done.
- *PROPITIATION* – In spite of modern efforts that shy away from the cross as a satisfaction of God’s wrath, this is what this means. Yes, it was done at the mercy seat and through Christ suffering the wrath of God for us. The wrath of God is not uncontrolled, capricious anger. Rather, it is a settled purpose of punishment against all that is contrary to His nature and demeans His glory. Yet, in His love and mercy, *GOD took the initiative* to display Christ as the propitiation of His just wrath. Jesus actually took God’s wrath on Himself as Isaiah wrote, “He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.”

This righteousness is *DISPLAYED BY THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST*. (v.25a). The point here is that God foreordained, proposed, purposed, or determined that Jesus should publicly be acknowledged and acclaimed as the focus and locus of all God’s saving work. We do not redeem ourselves. We cannot satisfy God’s wrath. Jesus Christ has. But notice this. God has done this, not to spotlight man in any way, but rather, to call forth worship and adoration and trust and faith in His Son.

## Righteousness Vindicating God

(v.25b-26)

Finally, a right standing before God is of little use if God is Himself not just in all His actions, including the justifying of the unjust. In one sense then the word righteousness here does not shift: it is all about being justified. The sinner is declared justified by God on the grounds of the cross. And God is demonstrated to be just through the cross.

So under the old era (both historically and personally), God passed over sins until Christ came. Until Jesus came and died on the cross, God saved people. He did not save them on the grounds of their law keeping nor the sacrifices they brought. He passed over their sins until the Savior came. He had purposed to make Christ the center of all His redemptive efforts so as to demonstrate to all that He is just in justifying the unjust who have faith in Christ.

So God is righteous – He is just – He is acting in accordance with Himself when He sets forth His Son as our righteousness and waits patiently for the day of the cross in redemptive history and the application of the cross to us personally. He was just to pass over sins because He had purposed to punish them in Christ. He was patient until that day. And so the cross vindicated God.

## **The Method of Justification (3:27-31)**

Paul highlights how justification is received and appropriated by answering three important questions or objections. Why is faith the way that the right standing before God is given?

### **Faith Excludes Boasting (v.27-28)**

Since we stand righteous before God by faith, we cannot boast in our works. When what we receive is a gift of trust, then the Giver is the one who is praised. For Paul, any way of framing our salvation through words that leaves man room to boast or glory is utterly wrong. This is the God-centeredness of Paul. Boasting is excluded because faith is the means and Jesus' work is the grounds. Not our works, but Jesus' worth and work, believed and trusted. So the integrity of the good news of a right standing before God apart from our working for it is upheld.

### **Faith Unifies Jew and Gentile (v.29-30)**

Since we stand righteous before God by faith, then Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, are one in faith. While the Law separated the Jew from the Gentile, the faith in Christ that gives a right standing before God unifies Jew and Gentile. Why is this? Because God delights through placing Jew and Gentile on equal footing to show His Oneness.

### **Faith Established Law (v.31)**

Since we stand righteous before God by faith, then the just demands of the Law are established and upheld and gloriously fulfilled. The allusion here to nullifying the Law and fulfilling the Law point back to Jesus. He did not come to set the Law aside, but as its reality and fulfillment as He asserted in Matthew 5:17-20. The Law described the righteousness of God and declared the sentence of death on its violators. So, while we cannot keep the Law, we trust Jesus for our right standing before God.

## **The Model of Justification (4:1-25)**

These paragraphs almost exactly parallel Romans 3:12-29. They also expand on his response to the objections that close Romans 3. So verses 1-8 develop 3:27-28 and show that boasting is excluded. Verses 9-12 develop 3:29-30 and show that circumcision makes no difference. Verses 13-22 develop 3:31 and show that faith fulfills the Law.

In this, Paul is continuing to show the integrity of the gospel and the unity of the Jew and Gentile in Christ. The argument of this chapter is structured along the lines of bringing forward examples of justification and connecting them to important texts from the Old Testament. So, though this larger section began with, "but now" signaling that we are in the New, justification by faith has ever been the way of justification.

### **Abraham Not Justified by Works (v.1-8)**

Here it is. If Abraham was declared right before God by the works he did, then he had grounds for boasting. But, the Scriptures in Genesis 15:6 say that Abraham *believed* God and righteousness *was credited* to him. This is what the Scriptures say. That makes it final. Abraham was justified by faith.

Why is faith the way of justification so that we cannot boast? Because if it were given because of works, then it would be on the basis of a wage earned. Our works would put God under obligation. It reverses the debt of our sin and makes God a debtor to the sinner doing good. But this is not the blessedness, the happy holiness, of Old Testament saints. Even David in Psalm 32:1-2 understands that God credits, imputes or puts to our account righteousness when we believe and stop trusting our works. Do you see the powerful affect of Paul's argument? Hear the two central phrases for the fostering of your faith. To you who turn from your works to trust the God who declares the unjust to be righteous on the merits of Christ, great is your blessedness, like that of David, when His righteousness is credited to you apart from your works.

Beloved, to have a right standing before God you must turn from trusting your works to believing on and trusting in Jesus Christ. Abraham was not justified by works. David was not justified by works. No one is justified by works. But great will be your joy when you simply embrace Christ alone as your righteousness from God.

### **Abraham not Justified by Circumcision (v.9-12)**

In one sense, we do not feel the impact of this paragraph directly. Probably few of you were brought up to believe that being circumcised brought you into a special relationship with God, making you and identifying you with His people. But many in Rome and all over the world believe this is so. The gospel comes to them to say that you cannot have a right standing before God by circumcision. How do we know this is true? Because Abraham was declared righteous before God by faith *before he was circumcised*. The shocking thing that Paul is insisting on is that Abraham was saved while he was still a Gentile.

Now there are huge implications from this simple, Scriptural fact. Two of them Paul draws and I want to indicate additionally.

- Circumcision then is a sign and seal of faith. God gave him an outward rite that reflected an inward reality. So the integrity of the gospel is upheld, even in the Old Testament. Abraham is saved by faith.
- Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe. God designed and revealed the timing of Abraham's justification by faith so that all who believe are united in faith. So the unity of those who believe the gospel is upheld. Abraham is not merely the father of the Jews, he is the father of all who believe, spiritually.
- No religious rite can save. The connection between circumcision and baptism is often used by some to prove that infants are to be baptized and by others, having such a baptism, that they are saved. Loved ones, regardless of where you stand in this issue, know this: just as faith preceded Abraham's circumcision, so faith must precede your baptism.

Abraham was not justified by religious rite. And neither are you.

### **Abraham not Justified by Law (v.13-15)**

Paul advances his argument by showing that the promises to Abraham were not a matter of the Law, but of faith. Abraham does not have and is not given the Law. He has a promise from God. Believing that promise, he was declared righteous. If we turn to the

Law, we place ourselves outside the promises of salvation given to Abraham, who is the Father of those who believe and nullify faith.

You see, the function of the Law was to describe righteousness and to condemn the unrighteous. It has no power to save. I have most clearly come to understand this in relation to gravity. We have a Law of Gravity which describes what we believe it is, what effect it exerts and what happens when we violate it. But the Law of Gravity in our textbooks is not gravity itself. The words in the text book will not cause you to fall from a tree but they will describe what will happen if you jump from a tree. So, the Law describes righteousness and what happens if you are unrighteous. But it cannot make you righteous. Only Christ can do that. That is the function of the Law – to expose your guilt before God and point you to your Savior.

Abraham was not justified by Law. You cannot be justified by the Law.

### **Abraham Justified by Faith (v.16-22)**

Justification is by faith so as to uphold faith in God's promises as bringing us grace, the favor and enabling power of God (v.16-18). Salvation is a promise, a promise to Abraham and to his heirs. Paul sees the words of God's promise that Abraham would have heirs and would be the father of many nations as pointing, not to Isaac and Ishmael, but to all those who would believe by faith. Yes, there is physical, genealogical descent. But once Christ came as The Descendent and the New Israel, then all those who believe and are in Christ are the spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham.

Abraham's faith also models for us believing God's promises in the face of impossibilities (v.17-19). This is the measure of true faith. He understood the impossibility of his own situation. But he did not waver in believing God's promise because he was fully persuaded about the power and perfection of God: power, in that God could do what He promised and perfection, in that God had staked His Name and character to His word. In this way, he gave glory to God or glorified God. So here it is. There is no Law yet. Abraham is a sinner who has fallen short of God's glory needing a right standing before God like all of us. God calls him out and gives him a promise to be believed and trusted. Abraham believes that promise by faith. Believing God's promise by faith glorifies God. So God credits righteousness to Abraham's account (v.22).

Abraham believed God's promises, thus glorifying God and being declared righteous before God by faith. You can be righteous in God's sight only by faith alone in Christ alone for God's glory alone.

### **Abraham Justified for our Faith (v.23-25)**

How do we leap from Abraham's faith to our own? The *for us* purpose of the Old Testament is at the center of this paragraph. We are supposed to read the Old Testament in the light of the cross. Yes, there is the Old and New and its accompanying discontinuities. But there are also massive continuities that teach us what it means to be God's people. These things about Abraham in the Old Testament are written for our sake also. The great object of Abraham's faith that he saw so dimly in the Old Testament has now been fully disclosed for us in Christ. The promises that he received of salvation for all people groups, we are now enjoying its fulfillment. And the pattern and example of unwavering commitment to God's promises, power and perfection is a God-glorifying faith.

At the heart of our faith is not a son, an Isaac, out of personal deadness – Abraham and Sarah are way beyond child-bearing age. At the heart of our faith is a resurrection from the dead. Abraham's believing that they would have a son is parallel to our believing that Jesus was raised from the dead. Our faith believes and trusts in the death – He was handed over for our transgressions – and the resurrection – He was raised for our justification. But we must believe in God, who raised Jesus our Lord. So faith moves from facts to trust in God Himself.

You can have that very same right standing before God by faith. Believe in God's promises of salvation in Christ and bow to Him as your sovereign ruler.

So I must conclude briefly.

## Conclusion

This is not faith in faith, but faith/trust/believe in God. So much religious talk is about the power of faith. Faith is no power. Faith itself does nothing. It is faith in God that justifies sinners and glorifies God.

The issue is a right standing before God.

- The problem is that we do not glorify God.
- The punishment is the wrath of God.
- The provision is the death and resurrection of Christ.
- The principle is faith that believes and bows.
- The purpose is to end boasting and glorify God.

Will you repent and believe God and His promises today? The wrath of God has been revealed and the glory of God has been displayed in Jesus Christ. Believe and bow to Him today.

# The Gospel: The Blessedness of Justification

## Romans 5:1-21

### Text

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, <sup>b</sup>we<sup>1</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also <sup>c</sup>obtained access by faith<sup>2</sup> into this grace <sup>d</sup>in which we stand, and <sup>e</sup>we<sup>3</sup> rejoice<sup>4</sup> in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>More than that, we <sup>f</sup>rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering <sup>g</sup>produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and <sup>h</sup>hope does not put us to shame, because God's love <sup>i</sup>has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>For <sup>j</sup>while we were still weak, at the right time <sup>k</sup>Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup>but <sup>l</sup>God shows his love for us in that <sup>m</sup>while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since, therefore, <sup>n</sup>we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from <sup>o</sup>the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>For if <sup>p</sup>while we were enemies <sup>q</sup>we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by <sup>r</sup>his life. <sup>11</sup>More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received <sup>s</sup>reconciliation.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as <sup>t</sup>sin came into the world through one man, and <sup>u</sup>death through sin, and <sup>v</sup>so death spread to all men because <sup>w</sup>all sinned—<sup>13</sup>for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but <sup>x</sup>sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not <sup>y</sup>like the transgression of Adam, <sup>z</sup>who was a type of <sup>a</sup>the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup>But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for <sup>b</sup>many. <sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For <sup>c</sup>the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought <sup>d</sup>justification. <sup>17</sup>If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness <sup>e</sup>reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup>Therefore, as one trespass<sup>5</sup> led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness<sup>6</sup> leads to justification and life for <sup>f</sup>all men. <sup>19</sup>For as by the one man's <sup>g</sup>disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's <sup>h</sup>obedience the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup>Now <sup>i</sup>the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, <sup>j</sup>grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, <sup>k</sup>as sin reigned in death, <sup>l</sup>grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Introduction****The Difficulties of Doctrine**

- Because of our Aptitude – we often are *not able* to handle strong truth because we do not exercise what we know to develop our discernment (Hebrews 5:14).
- Because of our Attitudes – we often are *not willing* to do the hard work that hearing, understanding and applying truth requires (Hebrews 2:1).
- Because of our Approach – we often leave it to others to do – we expect our doctrine to be fed to us.

**The Importance of Doctrine**

- For our Affections – truth is the track for our emotions. What we believe channels our affections. If we believe lies, we are vulnerable to lusts (Romans 1). If we believe truth, our affections are directed Biblically.
- For our Actions – what is truly believed is practiced. Please understand this: truth shapes your choices.

So we need to gird up our minds and hold them to the task of hearing doctrine that will illuminate God's good and glorious blessings in our justification.

**A Glory that Rejoices****(v.1-11)**

This is such a neat paragraph. It opens with having peace (v.1) and ends with receiving reconciliation (v.11). There is a grand progression in our exultation: we exult in the future glory (v.2) and in our present sufferings (v.3), which is grounded in glorying in God (v.11). God's love is poured out in us by His Spirit (v.5) and proven to us by His Son (v.8).

Justification brings us glorious privileges and provisions in which we rejoice.

**In Its Privileges****(v.1-5)**

Now remember that what we know is the source of our choices and affections (emotions). So this is not just a list of our privileges but a progression in our growth.

**We have *PEACE WITH GOD*****(v.1)**

In view of our being under the wrath of God because of our sin, what an enormous privilege it is to have peace with God.

We will not sense this *relief* if we have never experienced the sense of *alienation* and *separation*. The truth of the awful wrath of God is designed to cause us to really know and sense how separation from God. We need a real awareness of our sin and guilt so that our embracing of our Savior is rich and full in its experience of peace and reconciliation.

**We have *ACCESS INTO GRACE* (v.2).**

It is better and clearer to translate this word, *access* instead of *introduction*. It is not just our initial entrance, but our continuing privilege of access that is in view.

This is an access into a right standing in the sphere of grace. The access is to God through faith by grace. We have standing before God, a right standing before Him because of this grace.

**We can *EXULT IN HOPE* (v.3-5).**

The word *exult* is the same as *boast* earlier in Romans. But there is a very significant shift in thought the translators are capturing. While we must not boast in the good works we do, we must exult in the glorious work God has done.

There is a future aspect to the exultation. We who had scorned God's glory (1:21-23) and had fallen short of it (3:23) are now able to exult in the hope of God's glory (Schreiner, p.254). There is a confident joy in the assurance that we will magnify God.

There is a present aspect to the exultation. We exult in our trials and tribulations. Now this is not because we are ignorant or naïve. We exult, *knowing* that God is at work in those trials to sanctify in us what He has secured for us. Trials build endurance, which builds a proven character whose hope flows from the reality of God's love in us by the Holy Spirit.

Listen to how the NLT translates this last portion:

This expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.

This theme of not being disappointed in God and in His love for us thus opens this section of Romans. Romans 5, our hope in God is never disappointed, even in trials, because of God's love in us. Romans 8 will then end with, "What can separate us from God's love?" Absolutely nothing. We can never be separated from God's love poured out in us by His Spirit and proven to us by His Son. In the darkest days, we will not lose hope. We will never be disappointed with God.

**In Its Provisions (v.6-11)**

Now Paul wants to unearth the depths of our depravity so that we will more fully understand and rejoice in that which justification has provided. I am keying on the *while we were* language here.

**While we were *HELPLESS* (v.6-7)**

Christ died for us, the ungodly, at the time of God's appointment. We are helpless in our sins. We are unable to help or save ourselves. In the Greek it has this sound: we are without strength and without godliness.

Paul's irony comes through here. No one would die for someone who didn't need it and maybe some would die for another good person.

But the helpless, who are hopeless in their sins, are worse than that...

**While we were *SINNERS*****(v.8-9)**

In a demonstration of the character and quality of His love, Christ dies just for helpless and ungodly, but rather for those who are *still* sinners. The word shifts toward the idea of a positive corruption. And it is an aspect of astonishment.

Christ's death on the cross is a demonstration of God's love for us...

But that is not all it is. Through Christ death we have been justified and we will be delivered from His wrath. Notice carefully the change in verb tenses. There is a sacrificial, substitutionary death (in his blood). We have been justified, have been given a right standing with God, by that death. This is a justification *in the past*, both at the cross and at our conversion. And we will, *in the future*, be delivered from God's wrath through Christ.

Here is the eschatological dimension...

**While we were *ENEMIES*****(v.10-11)**

Marvel of marvels, *while* we were enemies, we were reconciled by Jesus' death and saved by Jesus' resurrection life.

How packed all this has been with transforming and hope-giving truth. Keyed on these "how much more" phrases, the crescendo rises and rises until the fortissimo of "WE EXULT IN GOD."

Don't miss the flow here. Christ died for the ungodly who were not only helpless and sinners, but were even enemies. So wrath is averted, relationship restored, reconciliation effected and thus we exult in God.

**A Grace that Abounds****(v.12-21)**

It astounds our ears how Paul can move from such affection raising statements to such pedantic and difficult doctrine. Let me assure you that the problem in this is with us, and not with Paul! The "therefore" that begins this section shows that it is not an intrusion or diversion or parenthesis. It is integral to his argument. The objective reality and subjective demonstration of God's saving love is rooted in salvation history.

Running through this text is a very important Biblical way of thinking. It is what the theologians call, Federal Headship. This means that we have a unity with Adam and Jesus Christ so that their actions affect all those united in them. Thus, when Adam sinned, we are viewed as sinning in him. When Christ died and rose again, we are viewed as having died and risen again with Him. The author of Hebrews uses this same principle to show that in Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek, Levi and his sons tithed as well. This is particularly difficult for us in the west because of our emphasis on individuality.

But this great text grounds abounding grace in this principle. In Adam we sinned, so in Christ we will be saved. So the grace in which we stand is not a grace that abounds.

## Because of our Ruin

(v.12-14)

Adam is a real person who is designated by God as the corporate representation for humanity. Sin entered the world through Adam and thus death entered as a result. Every one also died because everyone sinned (aorist). The implication then is that since everyone died, then everyone sinned.

Yet, there is a problem. In salvation history, the Law does not come till much later. Since sin is not imputed until there is Law, why did they die? They did not have the specific command like Adam did, so why did they die? Why is there death from Adam to Moses when there is no Law and no one else sins like Adam did against a clear and specific commandment (as it is recorded in the Bible, in salvation history)? Death reigns because all human kind is viewed as sinning when Adam did. Even if you never committed a single act of sin, you are still condemned. You sinned in Adam and his disobedience is put to your account.

Be careful denying this. If you deny your corporate solidarity with Adam, then you also must deny the corporate solidarity with Christ. If there is no union with a federal head, then there can be no saving union with Christ either.

So grace abounds in the face of our universal ruin in Adam.

## Through our Redeemer

(v.15-17)

Paul now brings us to exult in Christ by a series of contrasts between Adam and Christ, between the effect of Adam's sin and the power of Jesus' righteousness.

They are a bit difficult because of the precision and brevity of Paul's language. Here are the contrasts:

- Adam's sin affected all, but the free gift of grace abounds so much more than (v.15)
- All are doomed under condemnation because of the one disobedience but the free gift of grace justifies the transgressors based on the obedience of one while (v.16).
- Through Adam's sin, death reigned over us, but through the grace in Christ's righteousness, life will reign in us.

So, they are different because ❶ grace abounds (v.15), ❷ because justification is highlighted (v.16) and ❸ life reigns (v.17).

So we are in Adam, condemned transgressors ruled over by sin and death. Or, we are in Christ, justified by faith in His cross and resurrection and ruled by the power of His life in us.

## For our Righteousness

(v.18-21)

Finally, he concludes by summarizing and comparing the two.

One transgression, condemnation to all (v.18-19). One obedient righteousness (probably referring to His willing submission to a cross-kind of death) right standing before God to all. Now don't get confused: every human is condemned, but only those who believe are justified. Every human born in Adam is condemned; every human placed in Christ, is justified.

By the way. This puts any idea of long ages in Genesis 1 account of creation to death. Since death entered at Adam's sin, there was no death before hand....

The Law "came in", or according to Galatians, "was added" so that the awfulness of sin would be fully disclosed (v.20-21) and grace would abound. The Law made it clearer as to what sin was. Thus, where there was greater revelation about what was sin, so saving grace that justified such sinners abounded and was magnified. The purpose was that grace would reign in life where sin once did.

Through one act of Christ's righteousness (v.18) the many are made righteous (v.19) so that grace would reign through righteousness (v.21).

While you are condemned in sin as an enemy of God to the penalty of death, you may have peace and reconciliation with God through His grace. You may have a right standing before Him by faith in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Put your faith and trust in Him, today. **Conclusion**

Embrace the truth of our corporate unity in Adam and in Christ. It is necessary for understanding the universality of sin and death. It is foundational to our corporate unity in Christ and thus our essential unity with one another.

Exult in:

- Your peace with God because of your reconciliation.
- Your sufferings in life because of your hop in God.
- God Himself, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Expect and experience that grace will reign in life. Don't let sin with its consequences rule. Allow the mighty power of Christ's life to transform you. That is what Romans 6-8 will all be about.

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## Notes

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# The Gospel: Freed from Sin's Enslaving Power

## Romans 6:1-23

### Text

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been placed [baptized] into Christ Jesus were placed [baptized] into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by being placed [baptism] into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

<sup>15</sup> What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

<sup>20</sup> When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Introduction**

In our Bibles are a cluster of texts that define, describe and declare what reality really is. These are located all throughout the Bible, with the most significant for us as New Covenant Christians, those in Paul's writings. They would be texts like Ephesians 1, Colossians 1-2, Hebrews 2-4 and Romans 6-8.

Our study brings us to one the most important of those clusters of texts. They are significant because they build-on and assume the others while being intensely practical and life transforming. Romans 6-8 are how the gospel with its saving and sanctifying power causes us by faith to have hope while living in a fallen world. It tells us how, though we are in the presence of sin, we are not subject to its power.

Paul has been powerfully arguing that salvation is by grace received through faith. He has highlighted the utter sinfulness of man, the condemnation resulting from both Adamic sin and personal acts of sin and the marvelous grace in Christ. He has been insistent on faith, not works. He has elevated grace to the point that where sin increased, grace abounded. Now here is the test for whether you understand grace like Paul did and teach it like Paul did: does your teaching of grace cause people to respond with one of the following ways:

1. Since grace abounds where sin increases, let's just sin more so we will have more grace.
2. Since we are under grace and not under law, then we can do almost anything we want.

These two statements framed as questions are the basic structure of Romans 6. Verse 1 frames the first question: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" [ESV]. Verse 15 frames the second question: "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" [ESV].

But, all of this is fine hermeneutical structuring, but our personal questions are often unsettling and near as well to Romans 6. Here are the questions that plague us and are answered here:

1. *CAN* I continue to sin since we are under grace? More frequently this is, "Sin doesn't matter since I am under grace." So people think or say, "If I keep on thinking, wanting, doing or feeling this way, God will forgive me regardless." We are thinking of grace only as the benevolence of God and not thinking of grace as a realm or sphere in which salvation places us.
2. *MUST* I continue to sin since we are under grace? More often this is stated as, "I can't seem to stop sinning." What is being thought or said is, "Sin is too strong and powerful for me." We are not thinking of grace as an enabling power received by faith.

What is fascinating here is that both become excuses for my sin: (1) because sin doesn't matter and (2) because I can't help myself. Paul's responses to these questions, statements or implications are emphatic. Christians *ought not to* sin and Christians do *not have to* sin. You ought not sin because of your union with Christ (v.1-14) and you do not have to sin if you yield to Christ (v.15-23).

Now, it is important to sweep away a false and very prevailing view of Romans 6 and 7. There was a notion that if we just believe the facts in Romans 6 of our co-crucifixion and

co-resurrection with Christ, that we will stop sinning because we will be like a corpse to sin, dead to it. Therefore, what we must do is just believe God's word, rest in it and stop fighting sin and living as though it were a reality to us. This gave rise to the *LET GO AND LET GOD* slogan. This view was popularized by the Keswick Conferences in the 60's and 70's and is the centerpiece of the writing of Watchman Nee and the teaching of Bill Gothard. Dr. John Stott effectively responded to this teaching and corrected the error in his book *Men Made New*. Interestingly enough, he actually taught the series that became that book at a Keswick Conference.

One other note. Death in this text is meant to convey the concept of judgment. That is not to say that the death here is not real: it is. There is physical death and spiritual death and sin leads to both. It does so though because God takes a holy initiative to judge sin. Though sin has natural consequences as you violate God's law, death is God's judgment.

I have come to see Romans 6-8 as absolutely essential for people who have a right standing with God – that is, they are justified – to please and glorify God in every aspect of life – that is, they are growing in grace. You must not only understand the meaning of the text, but the essential structure that frames it in and the two major doctrines taught in it. All of this informs and builds our faith – what we believe – so that we will have grace to obey.

John Piper writes, "We Americans are pragmatists to the max. We want results. And we want them yesterday. We want them simply. We want them without too much pondering and too much pain. And in the church, we have developed all kinds of Christ-coated remedies that are shallow and short-lived. We are not, by and large, the deeply grounded saints that some of our forefathers were. [Romans] does not skip from chapter 5 to 12. It leads us down deep into the roots of godliness, so that when we come up, we are not people with lists, but people with unshakable life and strength and holiness and wisdom and love."<sup>1</sup>

## **The Power of our Union with Christ (v.1-11)**

This section is full of *INDICATIVES*. That is, it describes spiritual realities as truths to be known and believed.

### **Its Initiation- How it Begins (v.1-3)**

Now don't be put off by the word baptism. Just write in your Bibles the word *immerse* or *immersion* or *to place into*. That way, we will be translating the text. Now the text tells us we were united with Christ when we were placed into Christ. We were placed into Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit at our conversion. The ordinance of baptism is meant to outwardly portray what has inwardly *already occurred*.

### **Its Instruction – What it Means (v.4-9)**

I want to spend a bit of time here. I believe that there is much confusion about what is being said here. I am asking now to do some deep and difficult pondering, thinking. We have already seen some of this in Romans 2, 4 and 5.

You were born *in Adam*. You were in the realm or sphere of sin and darkness, occasionally called *the flesh*. In that realm you had what is called the old self, the person you

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *United with Christ in Death and in Life*, sermon 9/24/200, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN.

were as spiritually dead and training yourself in habits of sin. Then, when you were converted/saved, God placed you *in Christ*. You were transferred into the Christ's kingdom and spiritually united to His body through the Spirit. These are the invisible (and admittedly, difficult) spiritual reality. When you were placed into Christ and united to Him, you were joined to His death and resurrection.

Thus, the cross and resurrection are a spiritual reality to you in several ways.

1. You have physical life here on earth experienced in your body and through your five senses. It is real and authentic. It is not normal in the sense that we live in a fallen cursed earth with bodies that will decay and die with all its attendant difficulties and hardships.
2. You have spiritual life in the heavenlies and that spiritual life is hidden in Christ and will be unveiled when He comes. You are now seated in the heavenlies and have access to the throne room through Christ. However, this reality is only experienced *by faith* – not by sight (or our physical senses). When Jesus comes and we are glorified, our spiritual life in heaven will be reunited with our glorified physical bodies. This life in heaven is just as real and authentic as your life on earth – it is just invisible to you.
3. You have been separated through the cross from the old person that you were, the old self. You have a new identity in Christ. The old creation is gone and all is made new. But not completely. Remember that realities (1) and (2) are not yet joined in our physical bodies. So the old inner person that we were has been crucified and we have a new person.
4. You have a physical body that is living in the presence of sin. But the power of sin in your soul and body has been broken because of the death and resurrection of Christ. You have trained that body into habits of sin that you must now retrain into habits of righteousness. You do this, not by mere human willing and power, but by believing truth and God's promises and receiving enabling grace.

The point and purposes of all this are in verses 4 and 6: *so that we may walk in newness of life and not be enslaved to sin*. These great and wonderful truths are all aimed the sanctification, the growth in grace, the practical holiness of believers.

The principle here is demonstrated in Christ, His death and resurrection. His death and resurrection breaks sin's dominion over Him. Since we are placed into Him and united with Him, sin does not have dominion over us.

### **Its Implementation – How it Acts**

**(v.10-11)**

These verses then call for us to *CONSIDER* carefully these truths about Christ (v.10) and then *COUNT* them to be true for us (v.11). The call here is not to imagine something not so or to conjure something that does not exist or to put something to our account that is not ours. The clear call here is to believe these facts about the death and resurrection of Christ and then, knowing we are in Him and united to Him, believe, trust and count them to be true for us *because they are*. So, because Jesus is dead to sin through the cross and alive to God through the resurrection, so are we dead to sin and alive to God because we are *in Christ*.

So here is what you have to know and believe:

1. You have to know that you have been placed into Christ.
2. You have to know what Christ's death and resurrection mean.
3. You have to know how being placed into Christ and thus His death and resurrection applies to you.

Once again, let us remember that Christians are not people with simple lists of what to believe and what to do. Christians are people with a Biblical view of all things. If we do not know the truths we need to know, and we do not believe, then we cannot have the power of grace that comes through believing those truths. So, I challenge you to think deeply about all this, believe God's Word.

Verses 1-2 show us the incongruity, but not the impossibility of ongoing sin. It is not that it is not possible. The very imperatives through the rest of this chapter and through Romans show us that it is possible. But we must not think that our union with Christ and our being now in the sphere of grace frees us to live any way we choose.

## **The Precepts of our Yielding to Christ (v.12-14)**

In the light of these truths, there are two important *IMPERATIVES*. That is, we have the commands that are essential to applying our union with Christ. The truths about our spiritual reality in Christ call for responses from us. Therefore the way of holiness is not mysticism – just believe and it becomes real – nor is it activism – just will or choose to do right – it is believing in an obeying way. I realize and respond. The Bible clearly joins the *indicatives* and the *imperatives*.

### **Don't Allow Sin to Reign (v.12)**

Though we are not in the realm of sin we can allow it to extend itself into our lives so that it rules and governs us and eventually enslaves us all over again. How does sin attempt to assert its rule and governance over us? In the part of our soul that *WANTS*. It strives to take our God-designed wants and Biblically informed desires that were made to serve our pleasure in God and to turn them into that which we serve. Sin reigns through wrong desires: wanting something so much you'll sin to get it or will sin when you don't have it. The more you allow you wants and desires to control you, the more control they will have over you. And through those wrong desires, sin rules and reigns over you.

So, don't allow sin to rule you through lusts.

### **Don't Make Yourself Available to Sin (v.13-14)**

Here is the second and very important precept. This is the realm where our thinking about *putting-off* and *putting-on* operates. This is where we don't give room to the devil. This is where we do not put ourselves in temptation's way. This is where we flee from evil in all its forms.

Notice that there is a *stop* and a *start* in this text. You must do both or you will succumb to sin. You must stop presenting the members of your body for sin's use and start pre-

sending yourself for God's control. You do so as those who are dead to sin and alive to God. So the indicative is the back drop for the imperative.

Now look at the Bible's logic. We have to learn to Bible's way of thinking. In essence verses 13-14 say this: *don't let sin master you because sin will not master you*. Now that might sound odd to us, but it does because we come to the Bible with the error that if we are commanded to do something, then we alone are responsible to do it. But the Bible does not reason in this way. The Bible says here is the command from God: obey it because God is enabling you to obey it. So I choose not to allow sin to reign in my body because God is at work not to allow sin to reign in my body.

Now this works out in all the wisdom decisions of life and Christian growth in grace. You do not want to commit sin, so you guard against those things that tempt you to sin. You do not make opportunities to sin. You observe patterns and habits of life that make you vulnerable to sin and you break those patterns and habits. If you have a hard day at work, you don't rehearse all the badness of the day on the way home so that you arrive grumpy and angry. If you struggle with sexual temptation, you don't get suggestive movies and don't read secular magazines (the ad industry may as well be called the lust industry). If you are tempted to have a beer because you stop on the way home to chat with the guys, then you stop driving home that way. If you lose your temper while playing sports, you stop playing sports until you identify and repent of the issues of the heart.

Now on the surface, most of this sounds either stunningly simple or frighteningly legalistic. Understand this. Sometimes we sin just because we are stupid. What is causing us to sin is right in front of us plain to us and easily changed *if we are not allowing our desires to master us*. These sorts of things are legalistic only if you mistake the doing of them for being spiritual and use them as measuring standards over others lives. So you don't listen to jazz because when you do you smell a bar or taste a beer. But don't tell me then that not listening to jazz makes you spiritual and makes me a sinner because I do.

### **Don't Because You are Under Grace, not Law (v.14)**

I'm not going to explain or expand on this much because that is what verses 15-19 do. Basically, Paul says that we are to know doctrine, personalize it and make application because we have been transferred from the sphere of Law to the sphere of Grace. The next chapter will tell us more about the proper function of the Law as does Galatians. In fact, law keeping cannot save and in this age, it cannot sanctify either. Outward obedience must arise from the heart that is enabled by grace. When we try to live by Law, we go backward to being under the law, in the realm of the flesh and thus we deny the cross and that we are in Christ dependent on His grace.

### **The Principle of our Obedience to Christ (v.15-19)**

By way of an extended *ILLUSTRATION* Paul clarifies for us how our union with Christ and our surrender/yielding to Him is functioning. Paul helps us by using an illustration that would be quite familiar to his hearers and listeners. For us today, this is a bit more difficult since most of you are not personally familiar with slavery.

**In its Concern****(v.15-16)**

He begins by raising and answering the second major question. Since we are under grace and not law, we do not have license to sin. Now once again, notice the Bible's way of reasoning. Christians are not to sin because they have laws that tell them not to, but because they have a Master, the Lord Jesus to whom we yield and surrender. We make sin our master when we yield to it. We make Christ our master when we yield to Him. Christians then do not sin because of Law, but because of their Lord.

**In its Contrast****(v.17-18)**

What graciousness here as Paul acknowledges their good beginning in these things. Though he has those in Rome who will raise the questions, he is glad to be able to express gratitude that they are not dominated by that thinking.

Verses 17-18 are at the heart of Romans 6. There is little to add to the simplicity of how they summarize what we need to learn. Listen again to those verses: "*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*" We were once slaves to sin. We have an obedience from the heart by faith, believing and being committed to truth. Thus, once for all, at the cross, having been set free from sin, its realm, rule and ruin, we have become mastered by righteousness.

**In its Command****(v.19)**

At the heart of this is a command. Just like you used to continually present yourself to sin for its use, so now continually present yourself to God for His use. While the one resulted in slavery to sin and impurity, the other leads to slavery to righteousness resulting in sanctification or growth in grace.

**The Products of our Enslavement to Christ****(v.20-23)**

This section develops the *IMPLICATIONS* of our union and surrender to Christ. So while there are our responsibilities, there is also God's initiative. He unites us with Christ and places us in the realm of grace so that we do not have to sin. Being in the realm of sin leads to death. Being surrendered to God, being God's slave yields the fruit of growing in grace and sanctification.

**In its Contrast****(v.20-22)**

Paul wants us to see the terms of our slavery so as to motivate us to serve God. When we were in sin, we were without righteousness. That produced all kinds of fruit, evil thoughts, desires and actions of which we are ashamed now and resulted in death. But now, having died to sin, we are truly alive for righteousness. Its final outcome is life eternal.

Further, there is the great paradox here, as Stott points out. Each freedom to sin as its corresponding slavery. And our slavery to God has its corresponding freedom to live and please God.

**In its Cause****(v.23)**

Why is this so? Because sin has wages but eternal life is a gift. Once again, he points us to the importance of not banking on works but believing and receiving the gift of life.

All of us by nature are enslaved to sin – we don't rule sin, sin rules us. God is the decisive deliverer from sin – and our efforts, though real and crucial, are dependent on Him. Without this deliverance from sin and the resulting new direction of righteousness and sanctification, we have not and will not inherit eternal life.

**Conclusion**

- We have union and identification with Christ.
- We may not live as though sin does not matter.
- We may not live as though sin has control.
- We have been delivered from the old life and are empowered for the new life (v.4-11).
- We have been delivered from the condemnation of the law to the freedom and power of grace (v.14ff).
- We must not let sin master us because sin is not going to master us (v.13-14).
- We must obey truth from the heart, having been freed from sin and become God's slaves (v.17-18).
- We must present ourselves to God for His use, rather than presenting ourselves to sin for its use.
- We must understand that we may not live as though sin were not deadly and sanctification were not demanded.

Justification always brings sanctification leading to glorification. Our sanctification is decisively God's work and dependently our work. So, those who have been justified by grace will grow in grace. Sin is deadly and holiness is demanded. Isn't it glorious then that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

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**Points to Ponder – Applications, time permitting.**
*How We Confront Ourselves and Others*

- Examine thoughts and wants behind choices and emotions.
- Teach or remind the truths that we must know and believe.
- Apply and personalize truth through dialog – questions and answers.
- Surrender and yield in practical ways so as to overcome sin.

# The Gospel: Dead to Law's Arousing Power

## Romans 7:1-25

### Text

Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup> Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. <sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

<sup>4</sup> Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

<sup>7</sup> What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." <sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. <sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. <sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

<sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Ah, here we are in Romans 7. Here we are having learned of a decisive deliverance from the power of sin and dependent responsibility to yield to God. So, is a holy life now bounded by the Law? Since the law cannot save, do we now live by law-keeping – by a principle of law? Particularly when the universal experience of Christians is that of *STRUGGLE*. We find ourselves in the midst of an enormous battle that it seems should have been won in Romans 6. **Introduction**

It seems to me that Romans 7 is meant to do three major things:

1. It is meant to undercut reliance on law as a means of sanctification. Law keeping cannot save nor can it sanctify. And there are number of questions raised by that statement that Paul wrestles with here.
2. It is meant to reflect the universal struggle with sin in both unbelievers – particularly those who are self-righteous – and in believers, particularly those who function by legalism.
3. It is meant to show us the third way – that it is neither license nor legalism, but life. It is meant to bring us to Romans 8:20-25. Thus, Romans 7 is about the already-not yet reality of people in relation to sin.

In all the book of Romans, more ink has been spilled over the identification of the person in verses 7-25. Is it Adam whose experience is being closely mirrored? Is it Jews who have the Law but are largely without regeneration? Or is it Paul? If it is Paul, then is it Paul when he was unconverted or when he was saved? The answers to these questions were as varied and numerous as I had commentaries. So, I fully expect that among the Bible students hearing this message there will enormous division.

Without developing the merits and problems with each view, I want to propose that Paul has left it ambiguous on purpose. I do believe that it is autobiographical, yet intended to be universal. He has chosen to relate his own struggle because this is precisely the struggle we face as well. Further, since Romans 7 is preparing us for and taking us into Romans 8, then I am intentionally reading some of Romans 8 back into Romans 7.

Thus, what is going on Romans 7 is simply the already-not yet tension that a Christian lives in all the time – not only relating to his eschatology, but also relating to his sanctification. I have been decisively delivered from the power of sin and I will be fully and finally delivered from the presence of sin, but not yet. And that makes the struggle in Romans 7 what it is and the hope giving walk in and with the Spirit in Romans 8 what we all aim for and pursue after.

## **Our Freedom from the Law**

**(v.1-6)**

The Law is treated as a sphere of authority and Paul unpacks how we are delivered from it. He is answering the questions that might be raised in response to Romans 6:14 where we are said to be not under law, but under grace. How is that so and what does it mean?

### **Its Concerned Interrogative**

**(v.1)**

Paul poses a question based on an obvious principle. Law only has jurisdiction over a person when they are alive. This would have been true in both Jewish and roman law, as

it is in ours. A person who has died is beyond the reach of the Law. Their death moves them out from its sphere of authority.

### **Its Clarifying Illustration**

**(v.2-3)**

To make this clear, think about the authority of law to bind together a marriage. This is a carefully crafted illustration. Notice that the woman is freed from the binding affect of the law, not because of her own death, but because of the death of another, her husband. A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If he dies, she is released and is free to remarry *even if there were no divorce*. The point here is that they are married and any living with another man while married is adultery. Some have concluded from this that any remarriage is adultery unless the former spouse dies. I do not believe this is what Paul has in mind. To do that would destroy his illustration and make it non-sense. Paul has carefully chosen this illustration because it is so close to the reality.

### **Its Careful Instruction/Implications**

**(v.4-6)**

So Paul in verse 4 makes the connections between his illustration and its implications (v.4). Upon the death of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been released from the authority sphere of the Law. This is done so that we may be united to Christ and bring forth all that union is intended to bring forth, here described as *fruit*. We are released from the authority of the Law so that we might be united to Christ.

The summary of the argument is laid out (v.5-6). Notice how each of the phrases corresponds to Romans 6 – 8.

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.	Romans 6
But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code	Romans 7
but in the new life of the Spirit	Romans 8

Our release from the Law is a redemptive-historical reality that impacts us personally and individually. I get that from the language itself: “while we were” and “but now we are.” Now that Christ has come, having died on the cross and having been raised from the dead, the new era of life in the Spirit has begun. The Law as an authoritative sphere came to an end at the cross. Further, we were under law while in the flesh until we were saved. Now that we have been saved, we are now under grace. Once again, there is the historical aspect (before/after the cross) and personal aspect (before/after conversion).

This perspective prepares us to expect an inaugurated and incomplete experience of its reality. The rest of Romans 7 unpacks verse 5 to show how our sinful passions, aroused by law, worked in our body so as to bring about death. What follows is designed in such a way that we will be gripped by the glorious hope set forth in Romans 8.

**Our Functioning in the Law****(v.7-12)**

Verses 7-12 argue that though the Law is holy and its content just and good, it is bent by the power of sin to arouse wants and passions leading to evil deeds resulting in the judgment of death.

Even today when we take Paul at face value and declare that we are released from the Law's authority, people will ask, "Are you then implying that the Law was sinful or not holy?" Paul anticipates that objection. Of course not. Just because we are delivered from the Law, does not mean that the Law was sinful. What it was is limited. It had a limited purpose and was essentially powerless to cause what was commanded. That is because it is a description of righteousness, and not the righteousness itself.

One grammatical point: the use of the past tense verbs points to this operating primarily in the unregenerate, the unbeliever. There is a very definite and deliberate shift from the past tense in verses 7-12 to the present tense in verses 13-20.

**In its Purpose****(v.7)**

What was the purpose of the Law? The law is intended to identify and illuminate sin. We would not have known that coveting was wrong. The Law told it was wrong. So we know what righteousness is and sin is.

**In its Powerlessness****(v.8-11)**

But, instead of the Law actually producing in us what it demanded of us, sin uses the law to stir up evil desires and deeds resulting in the judgment of death. The problem with the Law is not the Law itself. The problem is in the perverting power of sin to take the good law and use it to stir up in us the very evil forbidden. This is the depths to which our depravity has taken us.

You have children see this principle operate all the time. Your children may have never thought of picking up the scissors until you said, "Don't touch those. They're sharp." Then your child's inward sinful nature takes the command not to touch and stirs up the desire in your child to pick it up. This doesn't make your command wrong – this shows that something evil lurks in the heart.

One very important note to make: Paul clearly sees sin as an active force, a power whose effects can be felt and described. Later, he will call this a law of sin. It has helped me over the years to compare this to gravity and the law of gravity. The power of gravity is "something" while the law of gravity describes how that power works.

So, verses 8-11 describe the energizing power of sin in the presence of people trying to live by law. Paul plays on the wages of sin being death from Romans 6 to be ironic here. Sin was dormant until it was told not to sin. Then sin was aroused to stir up the desire to do what was forbidden. So the desire for a sin leads to the doing of the sin with the result of judgment, death as the wages of desiring and doing sin.

**In its Perfection****(v.12)**

So sin is the problem, not the law. The law is perfect. The law itself is holy. The law may be weak, having a limited purpose and subject to being misused by sin, but it is still holy in God's sight. The law is the holiness and righteousness of Christ as exhibited and en-

coded for a people (Jews) in a particular time (Sinai to the cross). It is an authority sphere. But incredibly, our sinfulness is such that sin thrives within the sphere of the Law.

So, we are released from the Law, not because it is sinful, wrong or evil, but because it only reveal, not solve our sinfulness.

## Our Futility under the Law

(v.13-25)

In showing our futility under the Law, Paul develops the contrasts and conflicts between sin and law in me.

### In its Cause

(v.13)

OK, the Law is holy and I have sin in me that uses the Law to stir up evil. So, is the good and holy Law actually the instrument of spiritual death and judgment? Are we released from the Law, not because it is sinful, but because it produces death in me? No, it is sin *using the Law* that produces death. The wages of **sin** is death, *not* the wages of the Law is death.

Why? What is the cause of our futility under the Law? By making sin worse, sin is revealed for what it really is. The Law does not produce death, rather it fully uncovers the awfulness of sin's power and the utter depravity of our sinful state. We know how bad sin is because it is so perverted and powerful that it uses the Law the way it does.

### In its Conflict

(v.14-20)

The conflict is the great conflict between that which is spiritual and that which is flesh. These two categories are going to shape the rest of Romans 7 and most of Romans 8. There is that which is of God and invisible and essentially holy and spiritual. And there is that which is of the world, in and connected to fallenness and essentially evil and fleshly. And these are in constant and never ending conflict. The Law is in the category or realm of spiritual. But, we are in the realm of the flesh – we are still living here in the midst of fallenness.

Romans 6 is not supposed to bring us to some triumphalistic, victorious Christian life where we live separate from and not affected by any real struggle with sin. What Paul is driving home is that we are decisively delivered from the power of sin while we live in the presence of fallenness. If we try to live by the Law, we will be defeated by sin *even in the face of Romans 6* because the way sin uses the law to stir up evil in us.

So, here is the \$100 question. Is this Paul the sinner or Paul the Christian? Is this the struggle of a sinner under the conviction of the Law who wants to obey the Law but finds that sin is using the Law to cause what he doesn't want? Or is this a Christian who is struggling with the reality of sin when we know the truth of our deliverance?

Doesn't this text resonate with the reality of our own struggle? Aren't the tensions exactly what we feel? Doesn't this ring true with our experience? We delight in God's truth and yet seem enslaved to sin. We are under grace and yet live as though we were under law. We have been delivered from the power of sin, yet struggle with the presence of the flesh.

Notice the repetition of the word “do”. The struggle is clearly between what the law says to me is right and wrong and the powerful urges and passions of sin that cause me to do what I know I ought not to do. Here is his terrible plight. In himself he acknowledges what is right and wrong and finds in himself sin that does evil. So this section about what he does ends with the struggle is because of indwelling sin.

Notice also the repetition of the word “want”. In his flesh sin remains. He wants to do what is right, but finds himself doing the opposite of what he wants. We do not read this and say to ourselves, “Boy, I have no idea what Paul is talking about here.” We know this very well. We do what we know we ought not. And we often do the opposite of what we apparently want. He ends this section by repeating that it is indwelling sin that is causing him to do what he does not want.

Now, one word. Paul is not here saying that he is no longer responsible. This is not, “I am excused because this is so.” Not at all. This is the very essence of the frustration and futility.

### **In its Consequence**

**(v.21-25)**

Here is what Paul finds to be true in this struggle. Here are his observations and responses.

First, in verses 21-23 he observes the presence of conflicting spheres of authority and law. There is a principle that when we want to do good, evil is close at hand. How is that so? Well, we rejoice in God’s Word in our minds. But we find a principle that sin is at war in us, taking us captive through the power of sin our bodies.

How thoughtful Christians resonate with verses 24-25. We are wretched people indeed if this is all there is. If we have a decisive deliverance from sin’s power in Romans 6 and yet we are captive to its remnant because we are still in the presence of sin in our fallenness, then we need deliverance from the body that sins. And that deliverance is through Christ.

Here it is then. We no longer have to be subject to sin’s power. We need to yield ourselves to God and not to sin. The Law cannot help us and further, we are no long under its sphere of authority. Jesus will deliver us from the frustration and futility of our struggle with sin. And that deliverance has begun, but is not yet complete. We will fail and fall if we try to live in the old way under the Law. But we will begin to succeed and grow in holiness if we live the new way by the Spirit.

**Conclusion** Let me close by simply bringing together verses from Romans 6-8.

First, Romans 6:11-14:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

And, Romans 7:5-6:

. <sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

And, Romans 8:22-25

<sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Not license and not Law, but life by the Spirit – begun in now but groaning in struggle and suffering until the day Jesus comes.



# The Gospel: Indwelt by the Spirit's Enabling Presence

## Romans 8:1-39

### Text

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who in-

deed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

From Romans 1 through Romans 7, the Holy Spirit is mentioned only twice. Here in Romans 8, He is referred to twenty two times! While we have a decisive deliverance from sin's power through the cross of Christ in Romans 6 and a frustrating futility from sin working in us in Romans 7, we have a freeing liberation through the work of the Spirit as we walk in the Spirit in Romans 8.

## Introduction

"There is no reason why those who are in Christ Jesus should go on doing penal servitude as though they had never been pardoned and liberated from the prison house of sin." (F.F. Bruce) Romans 8 shows us how we live in the freedom and power of God's Spirit while yet groaning and suffering. While we walk in the Spirit, we do so in the world until the Lord comes.

## The Ministry of God's Spirit

(v.1-17)

We now have a present indwelling that enables godly living. "The fundamental contrast in the whole passage is between the inability and weakness on the one hand of the law to renew and reorder life so long as sin is in control, and the effectual life-giving power of God's own presence in the Spirit on the other. The outcome is to open the way for the fulfillment of God's holy and just commandment."<sup>2</sup>

Godly living begins with the truth that there is no condemnation for us (v.1) and ends with our personal testimony that there is no one to condemn us (v.34).

## To Change us by God's Righteousness

(v.1-8)

God's Spirit changes us because of *SPIRITUAL REALITIES* (v.1-4). We who are in Christ are not condemned. Why? The law of the Spirit of life set us free from the law of sin and death. What does he mean by this? He explains it in the next verse.

**The law of sin and death is this:** weakened by the flesh, the Law could not bring nor produce righteousness with the consequence that we are controlled by sin and condemned to death.

**The law of the Spirit of life is this:** God sent Jesus in a human body into the realm of the flesh to condemn sin and complete the Law for us.

"As believers 'in Christ', we are free from condemnation because Jesus Christ has completely fulfilled the law on our behalf. He became what we are—weak, human and sub-

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<sup>2</sup>James Luther Mays, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1996, c1988).

ject to sin's power—that we might become what he is—righteous and holy.” (D.A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary*).

God's Spirit changes us through *SPIRITUAL PRACTICE* (v.5-8). What God has done in Christ He makes true in us. Those who have been set free from sin's domination to the Spirit's control are those who do walk according to the spirit. They are characterized by how they live. They live the way they do because of their mindset.

Through these contrasts Paul explains why it is that the Spirit, and not the flesh, brings life. People 'in the flesh'—that is, those who live in the 'old regime' where sin and death reign—have mind-sets dominated by ungodly impulses (v.5); they cannot *submit to God's law* (v.7) or *please God* (v.8) but are under sentence of death (v.6). On the other hand, Christians, 'in the Spirit', who have been transferred into the new regime where grace and righteousness reign and who have therefore been given a new mind-set focused on the Spirit, enjoy *life and peace* (v.6).” (Carson, *NBC*).

Here is the primary function of the Spirit in practical terms of changing us: He gives us a new mindset that transforms us. Notice, those who mind the flesh, are live according to the flesh, are hostile to God, do not and cannot submit to God's law, do not please God and all this is death, God's judgment.

### **To Indwell us as God's Life (v.9-13)**

If the Spirit is in us, then we are in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We will be characterized life, the life of Christ. The indwelling of the Spirit imparts the character of Christ so that we will live the righteousness of Christ. Further, this life is God's gift by the Spirit as opposed to sin's wages of death and judgment.

In these verses, the words life and death are meant to convey blessing and judgment. The body is dead, not in that it is inanimate, but that it is corrupted and condemned; it is mortal. But we have God's approval and right standing before Him characterized by the word, *life*. So, the present possession of spiritual life in dying and mortal bodies anticipates the possession of spiritual life in a living and glorified body at the resurrection.

Notice that Christ is in us *by the Spirit*. The second person of the Godhead sits on the right hand of God in heaven. The Spirit indwells us in such a way that it is Christ in us. While maintaining the uniqueness of each person, Paul underscores the unity of the Godhead. The Father sent the Son to do what those who were in the Spirit needed (v.3-4). And now, the Spirit is in us as an extension of the Son (v.9-12).

Here we are called by faithfulness to the Scriptures to hold in tension two clear truths: that the indwelling of the Spirit infallibly secures eternal life, and that a lifestyle empowered by and patterned after God's Spirit is necessary to inherit eternal life. The Spirit is given to empower our activity in righteousness. (Carson, *NBC*).

### **To Assure us as God's Sons (v.14-17)**

Since this is so, we have a new obligation and a new identification. We are obligated in how we live. We are not to live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Why?

Because a ministry of the Spirit is to assure us that we are God's sons. The *being led by the Spirit* is not in terms of making personal decisions, but rather of being under the

Spirit's control. Those whom the Spirit controls, He helps to recognize their sonship, and bears witness in them that they are God's sons. He therefore functions as the Spirit who makes our sonship real to us. Adoption here is not the idea of being brought into the family, but that of being recognized as sons. So Jesus is publicly acknowledged as God's true Son and He responds with these words of intimacy, *Abba Father*. *And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."* (Mk. 14:36, ESV). This term also points to God's people who are His sons and daughters, graciously chosen by Him according to His good purposes. (See Rom. 8:23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).

One other note, in contrast to Lloyd-Jones, this work of the Spirit to highlight our being placed as sons and witnessing in us our sonship so that we have an assurance of our sonship *is the universal experience of all true sons*. Yes, there may be a time of special awareness and assurance, but this text is pointing us to a ministry of the Spirit to all those who are God's children.

Our adoption into God's family, however amazing and comforting, is not the end of the story. For to be children is also to be *heirs*: to be still waiting for the full bestowment of all the rights and privileges conferred on us as God's children (v.17). As *the Son of God* had to suffer before entering into his glory (1 Pet. 1:11), so we sons of God by adoption must also suffer 'with him' before sharing in his glory. Because we are joined to Christ, the servant of the Lord 'despised and rejected by men' (Is. 53:3), we can expect the path to our glorious inheritance to be strewn with difficulties and dangers. (Carson, *NBC*)

So, verse 17 is a transition from 1-16 to 18-30. We have this amazing privilege and glorious reality of being God's sons, and thus His heirs. Yet, we must suffer now. If we suffer now, we will be glorified later.

## **The Difficulty of God's Children**

**(v.18-30)**

We are now experiencing present suffering while longing for a future glory. What we have here is groaning and glory. There is groaning and glory for creation, in the Christian, by the Spirit for our good and God's glory.

You must never minimize the fact nor the severity of suffering for the Christian in this age. The key words here for you are *wait eagerly* (v.19, 23, 25) and *hope* (v.20,24-25). Your evaluation of the present sufferings in the light of the future glory is shaped by:

### **Its Example in the Creation**

**(v.18-22)**

The creation is now subject to the curse because of the fallenness of man. Deliverance from the curse awaits the time when the children of God will receive their glorified bodies. So, creation groans, while standing on tiptoe anxiously anticipating the day of glory for God's people. The world we live in now is subjected by God to the futility of fallenness. And it is awaiting the day when it will enter into the glory of radical transformation of the material universe when all will be made new.

### **Its Experience in Ourselves**

**(v.23-25)**

We share in creation's groaning and hope. We are groaning now. We have the *first fruits* of the Spirit – an assurance of our adoption – but we are awaiting the fulfillment of the

Spirit – our eventual adoption as sons. The fulfillment of being placed as God’s sons is in the reception of a glorified body. But we don’t have that yet. Here it is: we groan waiting for glory. We are assured and adopted, but not yet.

Most errors concerning the victorious or the victimized Christian life flow from not understanding verses 23-25. You are delivered, but not yet. You are adopted, but not yet. You have the Spirit, but not fully. You groan now in suffering and struggling because there is a splendor of glory to come.

### **Its Expression by the Spirit (v.26-27)**

How do we have hope then in the midst of this present groaning? Through the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. He helps us in our weakness. The weakness here is that we don’t know what to pray for, so the Spirit Himself, who knows the mind of God and the purposes of God, prays in us and for us. This intercessory work is characterized by groanings too deep for words. He is not here alluding to some inarticulate or ecstatic speech that the Spirit produces in us. Rather, the Spirit groans deeply because of our own sufferings and sins as well. This intercessory work is aligned with God’s will.

What strikes me here is how Paul is framing a theology of prayer here for us: Briefly, here are its key points.

- Prayer is always in the context of fallenness and futility. It is shaped by our needs, our own groanings as sons and heirs.
- Our own weakness and ignorance is assumed. We do not know what to pray for. This stands in stark contrast to our self-confident and long narrated requests for prayer.
- The Spirit prays for us according to God’s will. His praying is always aligned with God’s purposes in Romans 8:28-30.

### **Its Expectation due to God (v.28-30)**

Here is one of the most precious and hope giving texts in the New Testament. In the midst of groaning, in the midst of struggling with sin while walking in the Spirit, we know that God is at work in all our situations to transform and conform us into likeness with Christ. When we say that God is at work for our good and His glory, we had better understand this in terms of God being at work to change us. It is not merely *for our good*, but that we might be different. When someone says, “I cannot see the good in this,” that is a misunderstanding of this text. The good that God is always working toward is your becoming like Christ. So to not see the good in it is to not see how God is at work to change you.

Why is this so? On what is this grounded? It is grounded in the personal and providential sovereignty of God. Those whom God loved and chose (foreknew) He has determined beforehand that they will be like Christ. Then He moves in time and in those people’s lives to make it so: He calls them, He justifies them and He glorifies them. These are not potential outcomes, but assured future realities. So we lean towards the glory to come in the present experience of groaning now because God is at work to mold us to be like Christ.

What are we to learn from this? How does this fuel hope and shape affections? God has a glorious purpose for His people and creation at large. But that purpose unfolds through the struggle with fallenness. But God is at work to for our good to display His glory. So,

we are free from the power of sin, but not completely until that day. So, there is groaning now until the glory later.

## The Surety of God's Love

(v.31-39)

We are now inseparable from God's love while experiencing no condemnation and becoming more than conquerors. This is how we respond to all these truths in Romans 5-8.

### In our Answers

(v.31-36)

We are gloriously sure of God's love because there is no condemnation.

- Since God is for us, who can be against us? God's enemies, the fallen world, our sins, Satan – yes. But because God is for us, none of these is against *successfully*.
- Since God graciously gave us His Son, will He not give us all things? Absolutely. The gift of God's Son not only obtained all God intends for us, but it also makes it sure. As Stott puts it, "The cross is the guarantee of continuing, unflinching generosity of God." (Stott, p. 255)
- Since God has justified us, who can *CHARGE* us? No one. Our right standing before God means there is no lesser court to charge us.
- Since Christ has died and risen and intercedes, who can *CONDEMN* us? No one. Jesus stands to answer any and all accusations with His perfect and completed sacrificial work.
- Since all this is so, what persons or circumstances can separate us from God's love? None. Yet the brutal reality is that like Christ, our sacrificial lamb, we are set for suffering as well.

I can only conclude that we will have an ever greater experience of the surety and reality of God's love *in the midst of all the groaning circumstances outlined here*.

### In our Affirmations

(v.37-39)

We are gloriously sure of God's love because we more than conquer.

In all these adversities (cf. "all things" in Rom. 8:28 and "all things" in v. 32 with *all these things* in v. 37), rather than being separated from Christ's love, believers are more than conquerors (pres. tense, *ἠψπερνικουμεν*, "keep on being conquerors to a greater degree" or "keep on winning a glorious victory") through Him who loved us. Jesus Christ and His love for believers enable them to triumph. Consider 2 Corinthians 2:14; *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*.

Here is our conviction and our confidence. As Walvord points out: (*here to end of paragraph*) Paul's list of 10 items begins with death, where the list of 7 items in verse 35 ended. These elements in God's universe include the extremes of existence: (1) **death** and (2) **life** (in either death or life, believers are in God's presence); the extremes of created spiritual armies: (3) **angels** and (4) **demons** (angels would not and demons could

not undo God's relationship with His redeemed ones); the extremes in time: (5) **the present** and (6) **the future** (nothing known now, e.g., the hardships listed in Rom. 8:35, or in the unknown time to come); spiritual enemies: (7) **powers** (perhaps Satan and his demons; or possibly human governments); the extremes in space: (8) **height** and (9) **depth** (nothing overhead or underneath can suddenly come swooping down or up to sever believers from God's love); and (10) everything in the entire created realm. Absolutely nothing in His **Creation** can thwart His purpose for believers **in Christ**. What a climactic way to affirm the certainty of believers' salvation!<sup>3</sup>

So, we are more than conquerors – over sin, law and self. We have an abiding confidence in God's love for us. Stott wrote, "We need these assurances today...when insecurity is written across all human experience. Christian people are not guaranteed immunity to temptation, tribulation or tragedy, but we are promised victory over them. God's pledge is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never sever us from His love." (Stott, p. 259).

**Conclusion** More than conquerors:

- In the midst of groaning...
- Headed for glory...
- Inseparable from God's great love for us.

Let me no more my comfort draw  
From my frail hold of thee;  
In this alone rejoice with awe –  
Thy mighty grasp of me.

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<sup>3</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

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## Notes

## The Gospel: The Purposes of God in Election

### Romans 9:1-33

**Text**

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, f“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? 22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” 26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” 29 And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

As we approach the next three chapters in Romans, I want to set watchwords over our hearts: **Introduction**

- *GRATEFULNESS* for what we have learned. We must never come to a point where what God has taught us fuels pride, arrogance and a condescending tone to others.
- *GENEROSITY* with those who are having an honest struggle, but are engaged with the text of the Word of God. Let us ever be mindful that most of us came to what we believe through a struggle as well.
- *GUARDING* what we must teach, with conviction and without compromise. We must never treat truth as though it does not matter. It does. And it is not arrogant to say, "This is what the Bible says and teaches."
- *GRACIOUSNESS* when opposed knowing that our responsibility is to teach and instruct and then wait on God to change hearts.

Remember, sometimes hearing truth in a single message is like the taking a photo of my wife and making a line drawing...

Now, does this mean that we proclaim truth without passion and conviction? Certainly not. We have a responsibility to be passionate and persuasive. At the end of the day, the argument is with the Scripture. What we aim for more than anything is to show what the Scripture is saying here.

So, how did we get *here*? Why these topics at this point? Paul has just discussed the absolute certainty of God's love and unfailing faithfulness to His people. So the question could quite naturally arise, "So what happened to Israel? Why has God rejected Israel and turned to the Gentiles. Isn't what you have said in Romans 8 either not true or it means that your placing the Jew and Gentile on equal footing is not true. How will you solve this problem?"

Romans 9-11 is a Theodicy. It is Paul's defense of God, His personal love and covenantal faithfulness and sovereign initiative in people's lives.

## The Humble Perspective

(v.1-5)

Paul sets the tone here in his public grief over Israel's lost privileges. There is no arrogant triumphalism, but humble pity and deep regret.

## The Attitude of Paul

(v.1-3)

Paul's attitude reflects that which is commended to us in Jude 22, "*But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*" [ESV]

He affirms his attitude against those who would accuse him as the apostle to the Gentiles of arrogance (v.1-2). He truly cares what happens to the Jews – and affirms this with an oath and an assurance. This is so important to him that he is willing to be accursed from Christ for their sake (v.3). In this he follows Moses on Mt. Sinai who intervenes and intercedes for God's people.

In the midst of this, he begins immediately by making a distinction – by clearly identifying who he is concerned for. It is those who are his kinsman in the realm of the flesh. He is talking about a national and ethnic identity – he is talking about Jews. This is going to unfold as a very important distinction as he unpacks God’s purposes in election.

### **The Advantage of the Jews**

**(v.4-5)**

Now, even though they are on the same footing as Gentiles, they are not without their special privileges. He lists them here. They have been adopted as God’s Son as we see in Exodus 4:21-23, “*And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”* [ESV]. The allusion here to adoption is meant to take us back to this in Exodus because it is the foundation on which he builds his argument. We will find more references to it as we move forward.

The Jews had the glory of God dwelling among and the covenants to bind them to their God. They had the Law of God as their charter of life along with its directions for worship and its provisions and promises. Their privilege involved having the Fathers (patriarchs) and the great Son, the Messiah, God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Again that phrase, in or according to the flesh – Paul is their kin and Jesus the Messiah is their King. For the Jews, here is the gospel – the Messiah would be both human (according to the flesh) and Sovereign God (God over all). And He is the recognized and blessed one from God .

As D.A. Carson writes, “The privileges that Paul has enumerated all stem from God himself and could be taken to guarantee—indeed, were taken by many Jews to guarantee—the salvation of Jews generally. It is this salvation that the gospel specifically calls into question (see *e.g.* ch. 2), and, by doing so, raises the issue that is central to these chapters: has God abandoned his promises to Israel (6a)?” [New Bible Commentary].

### **The Foundational Principles**

**(v.6-13)**

There are two foundational principles that uphold the faithfulness of God to His people. It is not as though God’s Word had failed. Confidence in God’s promises are sustained by understanding who God’s people truly are and how God is working out His purposes.

#### **The Identification of God’s People**

**(v.6-9)**

First, we must know who God’s people really are. The Jews assumed that their national/ethnic descent from Abraham automatically included them in all the promises God had made. Paul shows that this is not so.

So, he states the principle: *not everyone who descended from Abraham are the true children of promise*. Physical descent is not the qualification. It is not a mere matter of heredity or parentage. This is demonstrated by showing from Genesis 21:12 that Isaac was the child of promise, not Ishmael although both were the physical descendants of Abraham.

In Galatians 3, Paul shows how we who have been placed into Christ are now Abraham’s offspring and heirs in the sphere of promise. “*But now that faith has come, we are no*

*longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."* [ESV]. That Isaac is the son of promise is demonstrated from Genesis 17:21.

So God's Word has not failed because God's people are those who are counted as offspring because they are in the line of the promise. It is not according to physical descent – not Ishmael – but according to promise – Isaac.

## **The Instruction on God's Purposes**

**(v.10-13)**

Now certainly, every Jew would agree with Paul up to this point. And every Jew would recognize and loudly affirm that Ishmael is excluded from the line of promise. But what about everyone born to Isaac? Are they all in the line of promise as well? If all are, then aren't all Israelites automatically in as well? And if some are not, then on what basis are they excluded or the ones saved, included? These are the questions that Paul moves on to answer.

The next narrowing of God's people is among those who would normally be according to promise. Rebekah has twins, Esau and Jacob. Both of them are in the line of Isaac, are according to promise and have the same mother. Yet, one is chosen and the other is not. Jacob is on the one through whom the line of God's true people continues. Jacob is the one who has a personal salvation and a corporate unity with God's people.

And this choice happens before they were born, before they did good or evil, before they did any works. God has a purpose He is working and He chooses individually and corporately so that His purposes are accomplished and fulfilled. Part of God's purpose is to highlight His own initiative – He is the one choosing and calling – so that man cannot boast.

Paul underwrites this as a proof of God's faithful and unchangeable love by quoting from Malachi 1:2-3, *"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob 3 but Esau I have hated."* [ESV]. Notice that Israel was questioning the love of God in Malachi. God's response is to point to His unchanging and steadfast love in election. He loved them – how were they to know for sure? Because he had demonstrated that love by choosing and loving Jacob and not choosing and hating Esau.

May be necessary here to distinguish between the Western legal idea of a corporate body having legal standing without considering the individuals involved and the Bible's idea of a corporate reality which ALWAYS involves and considers the individuals making up the corporate body.

Now, many commentators and theologians say that Paul is talking about corporate election, not personal. They argue that Paul has in mind the nation of Israel and the movement of redemptive history through the corporate. Others say that salvation is not in view here, rather national/ethnic identification as the people of God. However, the problem with that is Paul has declared the love of God for individuals in Romans 8 and uses individuals in Romans 9 as evidence that God's word and promises have not failed. Yes, there are corporate ramifications – but in the Bible a corporate body is always made up of real human beings as individuals. Thus, Israel are a people. And the church are a people in Christ. But *A PEOPLE* is the plural of a person – individuals considered together.

So God's people are according to His promise and according to His purposes. Individually and thus corporately, we are His because of His Covenant faithfulness and His Choosing purposes. Therefore, His Word has not failed because of His effective promises (v.6-9) and His elective purposes (v.10-13).

## **The Challenging Problems**

**(v.14-26)**

Now certainly, this raises problems, questions and sometimes, loud and vociferous challenges. Paul anticipates them and responds to them. Most people who object to the doctrine of election do so along the lines of one or both of these categories. Further, if your doctrine of election does not raise these objections or is not vulnerable to these two objections, then your doctrine of election cannot be said to be the same as Paul's. I am not saying this to be arrogant or condescending – I am saying this because this is exactly how Paul anticipates people will respond to what he has just written.

Both of these objections are connected to what he has taught with the phrase, "What shall we say, then..."

## **God is not Fair to Us**

**(v.14-18)**

### **The Objection Stated**

Paul recognizes that people will say that this is not just. In our modern day, because we fail to distinguish between humanistic fairness and Biblically oriented justice, we say, "This isn't fair. Your doctrine of election is not fair because Esau (and by implication, other people) don't have a chance or an opportunity to accept or reject God."

When we say this, we are accusing God of injustice or we are establishing a standard of justice that is different from God's and then rejecting what Paul is teaching based on that. Paul is emphatic that what he has just taught is not contrary to God's justice. This is not a world in which everyone having an equal opportunity to accept or reject God is the standard for fairness. This is very hard for us, particularly when our sense of social justice runs so much along the track of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity is an illusion, both socially and spiritually. And to raise it up and charge God with injustice or to reject election as true because of it is not wise.

### **The Response Developed**

This is why Paul responds as he does. What is interesting to us is that as he develops his response, he actually ratchets up the emotion factor.

Listen to what he says: God is free to show mercy and to harden whomever he chooses. He did this with Pharaoh. And God did it in order to accomplish His purpose and to proclaim His Name. Now we have to stop and think about what Paul is saying. God is sovereignly free to give mercy to anyone He chooses and is under no obligation to show mercy to anyone. He shows mercy and hardens according to the good pleasure of His will. He does this to demonstrate His power and to declare His character. Remember that the name of God is the label for His character.

So, to those who say, “It is not fair,” Paul responds by saying, “God is free – free to show His mercy to whomever he wishes so that He is glorified – His power and character are acknowledged and acclaimed.”

## God cannot Blame Us

(v.19-26)

When we respond to “It is not fair” with “God is free”, then that leads to the next objection.

### The Objection Stated

If God is doing whatever He wants, then how can He hold us accountable? See how Paul puts this objection: “Why does He still find fault. After all, who can resist God’s will?”

I understand how easy it is to wonder if God is choosing to love and save and show mercy on whomever He chooses, then why am I at fault? Why is it that Pharaoh just cannot stand before God and say that the reason he was not saved (or others are not saved) is because God did not choose him and in fact was actively involved in hardening him. I mean, Esau not only didn’t have a chance to repent and be saved, but Pharaoh is being hardened by God!

### The Response Developed

Well, Paul’s response to this objection is quite forthright and unsympathetic. Basically, who are we to object to the way God is and to the way He has ordained things to be? To put it crudely, who are we to even raise such an objection!

He clearly illustrates the nature of reality by using the potter and the clay. It is absurd that the clay should challenge the power, wisdom and purpose of the potter to do with the clay as He chooses. Doesn’t God have the right to do what He wants: to make this clay into any sort of pot He chooses? Would we actually say, “No, God *MUST* make all pots equally alike and save those who respond to Him,” with the emphasis on *MUST*? Do you really think you are going to tell God what He is supposed to be like and what the world is supposed to be like?

Now listen to me – I am trying to represent Paul accurately here. I am not trying to over speak this. Look at the text – isn’t this what Paul is saying? This is not arrogance or condescending. It is simply the way Paul states his response. It seems to me that while we need to be generous to those who have an honest struggle, those same people need to be generous with us who are wanting to be honest with God’s word, even in the hard texts. I almost wish I could skip the next few verse, but they are integral to Paul’s argument and his response.

Now we sense that Paul knows how hard what he is about to say is to swallow. He makes it a question, a “what if.” Now he is not proposing this as a possibility, but as the certain nature of the case. How do I know that? Because he supports from the Scripture, citing Hosea. So here is the surprise: rather than softening the argument, he actually presses it home in a harder, more difficult way.

Let me summarize what Paul is saying here as best I can. God will show His own glory in greater way by showing mercy on some vessels while showing a lesser, but no less real glory in His wrath on the other vessels. What is highlighted is not the outpouring of His wrath, but His long patient endurance of their rebellion and resistance to Him. While His mercy is highlighted as He moves to save those totally undeserving vessels He has chosen to love.

Paul does not shy away from saying that each of these vessels were prepared for the end they suffer or enjoy. If God is free in His mercy and sovereign in His power and purposes, then He is free to do this as well. He concludes with the quote from Hosea to show that God will call a people, the Gentiles, His people. And in the Scripture where the Gentiles were set apart from the Jews as not the people of God, He has set forth that they will be called the sons of God.

At the end of the day, this free mercy of God and His sovereign power and purposes place the Jew and Gentile on the same footing. And this is the lesson we all need to learn and hear and imbed deeply in our hearts. That God saves anyone is sheer mercy and grace. He is under no obligation to save anyone. He could have let us simply go on in our sin to the destruction we justly deserved. But He has revealed Himself as a sovereign and merciful God. Rather than turning away from the God who has revealed Himself to be like this, we should embrace His mercy shown to Jew and Gentile in His effectual promises and elective purposes.

## **The Final Proof**

**(v.27-33)**

The final proof that this is an individual and eschatological salvation is offered in the citation from Isaiah 10:22-23.

### **Its Scriptural Content**

**(v.27-29)**

Here is the proof that God is moving to save a remnant, a select group from within Israel. No matter how large the nation may be physically, only a few will be saved. And if God does not save this few, then the nation will be utterly destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now, as we move from here into Romans 10-11, Paul has just defined for us who Israel is. It is not the church. And it is not just those who have descended from Abraham or Isaac. It is a remnant of Jews who will be saved by being a part of the body of Christ so that in the last day, every son of Abraham will stand before the God of the whole earth who declare them justified on the account of Christ and chosen by His loving and sure mercies.

**Its Summary Conclusion****(v.30-33)**

So, what do we say in conclusion? Well, he picks up again that ever present thread in Romans: salvation and justification in God's sight are by faith and not by works. Faith is placed at the center. The Gentiles who were unconcerned about having a right standing with God received it through faith. And national/ethnic Israel did not receive it because they pursued it by works.

God has purposed to place Jesus Christ as the central object of faith and trust. The Jews stumble over that because their trust is in law works. Those who do believe, do so because God has taken the initiative in mercy and love to choose, call, justify and glorify them. Thus, His word does not fail. His love is steadfast and abiding. And His people are saved by faith in Christ, whoever they are.

Now, let me close this morning with a summary of Romans 9 that reflects what it teaches, **Conclusion** does not contradict other texts, proclaims the power and character and fame of God so that we will believe and bow, so that we will not run away from Him but run to Him.

- There is distinction between the physical descendents of Abraham with their advantages and the spiritual children of Abraham with their election salvation.
- This distinction exists because of God's purposes in election.
- This election is personal (Isaac/Ishmael/Esau/Jacob, Pharaoh) while having corporate and eschatological realities.
- Election taught Biblically will raise two objections:
  - ❶ God is not faith and ❷ God shouldn't blame us; which are answered:
    - ❶ God is free to show mercy as He chooses;
    - ❷ God is sovereign and free to glorify Himself as He pleases.
- Election is aimed to show God's glory:
  - ❶ In a lesser, but still authentic way through His wrath on the lost highlighting His holiness and justice;
  - ❷ in a greater and magnificent way through His freely choosing whom he would save highlighting His love and mercy.
- Election magnifies God and illuminates His glory because it is extended to all people groups – narrower for the Jews in the remnant but broader as it includes the Gentiles.
- The point is to demonstrate that righteousness comes faith, not by worth or works.
- All this is place Christ at the center of God's grace and glory.

So, I call you to believe in and bow to the God of the Bible. O, love Him for His mercy. Flee to Him for His grace. And Christian, marvel and worship Him for the freeness of His mercy and everlasting love that has been shown to you as He has chosen you, called you, justified you and will one day, glorify you.

**Soli Deo Gloria.**

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# The Gospel: Principles of Faith for Salvation

## Romans 10:1-21

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. **2** I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. **3** For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. **4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

**5** For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. **6** But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** or " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

**14** But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

**18** But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

**19** But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." **20** Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." **21** But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

**Introduction**

What a wonderful parade of truth these chapters have been. There is grand precision and deeply stirring majesty as each marches by. We can see the individual band members, hear the instruments, but the great glory is in a view of the whole – of seeing it all pass by. Doug Moo helps us make the connections to Romans 9:30-33. Paul has shown that Israel’s failure is ultimately Christological: by failing to believe in Him, Has become for Israel the cause of her downfall. (See Moo, *Romans*, p. 617). So Christ is at the center of Israel’s disbelief and is the grand object of faith and trust for all.

We are brought here to see how the elective purpose of God is worked out in terms of Israel’s rejection of God and the centrality and necessity of faith in God for salvation. It answers what can easily be the next objection: how can I be saved or know that I am saved if it ultimately rests in God’s choosing? Paul’s answer to that is not a complex treatise on the relationship between God’s will and man’s will, but rather the simple proclamation and invitation to believe.

So, we must not take the vertical theology of Romans 9 and reject the horizontal responsibility of Romans 10. (See Hughes, p. 184). God has an elective purpose that chooses, calls and completes. But there is within that the invitation to all and the responsibility to respond. To reject God’s offer of salvation on the grounds of not being elect is in and of itself a form of rebellion against God. You can do nothing about Romans 9 – it is solely of God and God alone. But you can respond in the context of Romans 10 – so we invite you to hear and heed the Word this morning.

**The Problem of Lostness****(v.1-4)**

I am convinced it is harder to get people lost, than it is to get them saved. And no man is saved who does not understand the Biblical nature of his lostness.

**In Truth Shaped Affections****(v.1)**

Paul here understands what God intends for Israel and then his affections and prayers are shaped by that. God’s purpose is to save those whom He has chosen and to fulfill to them all His promises. So, we long for their salvation for them to become the true people of God.

This is so important. Our desire and prayer now for Jews is not that they will have a homeland in Israel or reenter the land – all of their limited Old Testament hopes. Our desire and prayer for Jews is that they will be saved – they will enter all the Christ centered glory of greater hopes and promises and fulfillments.

And this also is to shape our evangelism of Gentiles as well. Understand this – God is not here to meet all your social, emotional, physical, relational, financial “felt” needs. He is here to save you from needing and wanting and bowing to all those things – He is here to give you Himself as your Redeemer and Ruler and thus, by faith, His righteousness.

**In Accurate Spiritual Analysis****(v.2-3)**

He understands three essential elements of lostness and particularly, that of the Jews. He wants us to see that even zealous people for God (much less just zealous people) can still

be lost. Strong and passionate belief in error or false gods is condemning, not commendable.

*THEY ARE IGNORANT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.* They either do not know or do not see in the Scripture they read or hear that what is required is a right standing before God solely on the holiness of God. Even in reading and obeying the Law, they do not come to the standard of God. In effect, they do not see Jesus Christ, the Lord.

*THEY ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS.* Lost people are trying either to set their own standard, substituting it for God's or they are trying to prove that they live up to God's standard. This double idea is contained in establishing our own righteousness.

*THEY DO NOT SUBMIT TO GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.* Here is the stunning result. They do not submit – stop – why *submit*? Because one of the main arguments Paul is going to develop is that Christ is God's righteousness as Lord and Messiah. So to be ignorant of God's righteousness in Christ and to establish their own, there is a rejection and rebellion against Jesus, who is the very righteousness of God.

Once again, our categories are being deeply challenged. When you attempt to be self-righteous in God's sight, you are in open rebellion to the Lordship of Jesus, the righteousness of God. This is not often how we think of religious and good/moral people. But when religious or moral people offer up their own righteousness, then they reject Christ.

### **In Christ Centered Belief**

**(v.4)**

Here is the explanation: "Christ is the *telos* of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes." This is the theme of this text.

So there is a question that arises from this text. In what way is Christ the end of the Law? Does He terminate the Law? Does He complete the Law's purpose? Or does He end a function of the Law, that is, is He the end of Law for righteousness? I am of the conviction that Christ is the end of Law: He is righteousness apart from the Law in the sphere of His Lordship and salvation thus He serves to complete the Law's purpose – He is its fulfillment, its penultimate reality. And since no one has achieved a law righteousness and He has been subjected to the righteous demands of a broken law, He is now the standard for righteousness – not in works but in faith. Does the Law still exist and have force? Yes, over those in the flesh who are striving to assert their own righteousness. It continues to set a standard, inflame depravity and eventually pass the death sentence.

But, praise God, believing in Jesus transfers us out of the realm of its rule into the realm of Christ's rule so that we recognize and submit to the righteousness of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Our Salvation by Faith**

**(v.5-13)**

Kent Hughes wonderfully summarizes this paragraph for us when he writes, "We do not have to go to Heaven or into the world of the dead to find Christ. He is near us. Nor does salvation belong to the elite who have taken mystical journeys to Heaven or Hell. For those knew something of the Scriptures...the saving words was on their lips and in their heart.

That is, the gospel of Christ – the Word of faith – was (and is) available, accessible and simple.” (Hughes, *Romans*, p.187.)

### **Its Practical Accessibility**

**(v.5-8)**

This part of the paragraph are both clear in some respects and quite challenging on another. Paul is going to show how Christ’s being the end of the Law means that salvation is near and accessible. This is one of the glories of the gospel.

Let me begin with *WHAT IS CHALLENGING* here. First, the two quotes from the Old Testament setup a contrast, not to pit Moses against himself, but rather to show how Israel misconstrued Leviticus to offer a righteousness based on the Law. Deuteronomy, which is an explanation of the nature of the Law points then to a righteousness by faith. Listen to the whole paragraph from Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

*“For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. [ESV] So what God commands its easy and accessible.*

The question arises about how Paul is using the Old Testament here. How can the texts he quotes be used to prove his point? On what sound hermeneutical principle does he reach back and take Deuteronomy 30:12-13 and use it to prove that faith in Christ is what they refer to? Now the solutions are wide and varied. I believe John Stott has hit on it. To ask, “How can Paul use the texts to *prove* his point?” has already misled us. Paul is not using these texts to prove his assertion. He is developing a parallel. He is showing a similarity. He is showing that Israel has not excuse for rejecting the word of faith, near and accessible to them because they should have never relied on a law righteousness; they should have relied on a faith righteousness that obeys. So, he is showing that salvation has always been available and accessible.

*WHAT IS CLEAR* here is that Christ is not distant from us so that we have to go up into the heavens to bring Him down and we do not have go into the depths of death to bring Him up. In other words, Christ has already come in the flesh in the incarnation and He has been raised from the dead. This means that salvation is no longer a matter of physical contact with Christ, but of spiritual receiving by faith. So, He is just as near as confession of faith in Him, bowing to Him as our Ruler and trusting in Him as our Redeemer.

### **Its Personal Responsibility**

**(v.9-10)**

But we are not passive in this. We have a responsibility to respond. There is a very clear “if – then” in this portion of the paragraph. If you confess and believe, then you will be saved. Salvation then is not far off and distant. It is not some esoteric body of philosophical speculation or religious formulas or secret words – it is the simplicity of bowing to sovereign Ruler of the universe, acknowledging His authority and rights over us and believing and trusting the Jesus is the only Redeemer through the real, historical events of His life, death and resurrection.

Paul makes in verse 10, a most glorious statement. When we believe in our hearts, then we have a right standing with God. And when we publicly confess or swear our allegiance to God, then we are saved. We long for Israel (and Gentiles to be saved). But no one can be saved by works, by a legal righteousness. But you can be saved by believing the gospel and bowing to Christ. Thus you will turn away from establishing your own righteousness and will submit to Jesus Christ, who is the righteousness of God.

### **Its Scriptural Universality**

**(v.11-13)**

The greater glory of the gospel is that this invitation is not merely extended to Jews, but to everyone. “Everyone who believes will not be put to shame.” Paul is now coming back to one of his major themes, that the Jew and Gentile are now on the same footing – there is no distinction between them. Not just Jews, but everyone who believes. Not salvation by the Jewish Law, but salvation by faith in Christ.

This universality is grounded, not just in the Scripture, but also in the very nature and character of God.

- He is Lord over all. Since He is Lord over all then everyone who believes and bows is saved and justified.
- He is rich to all. He bountifully and gladly pours out all His riches in Christ to any who believe.

Why is this so? Because the fulfillment of God’s promises have begun in Christ. Both Peter in Acts 2:21 and Paul here understand Joel 2:32 as referring to salvation in this era of the Spirit. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. What is interesting here is that we must call on the name of the Lord, not just so that God will know that He is being addressed, but also so that we will know the kind of God we are calling on. We are not just calling on God for salvation – we are calling on His Name – His character and attributes and mighty saving work as revealed and disclosed in the Scriptures.

### **The Responsibility for Evangelism**

**(v.14-17)**

From man’s responsibility to believe the gospel, Paul leads back to our responsibility to send proclaimers – in personal witness and public preaching because faith to believe comes through hearing the Word.

### **Its Compelling Logic**

**(v.14-15)**

The questions are meant to bring us from understanding man’s responsibility to call on God to our responsibility to call to sinners. How can people call unless they believe? How can they believe if they do not know. How can they know if we do not tell them? The answer to all this is *they won’t*. Now this is surprising following on Romans 9. But understand this: the responsibility to believe is enfolded in the responsibility to proclaim. We must spread the good news of the glory of God to everyone – to every people group – **because** God has chosen to love and save people everywhere.

How will we go if we are not sent? We won’t. The point here is to send us. This is not the special sending of apostles, missionaries or evangelists. Rather, this is a sending of all of God’s people to the work of spreading the gospel. Yes, some will go as office bearers and others will be specially enabled by God’s Spirit. But if we love our Ruler

and Redeemer we will speak of Him and invite others to Him and tell the good news about Him as much as we can.

### **Its Obvious Problem**

**(v.16)**

Paul then quotes from Isaiah 52:7 leading us into Isaiah 53. Once again let me remind that often an Old Testament portion is quoted in the New Testament so as to send us back to the *whole context*. So how beautiful are the feet of gospel proclaimers. Yet they will often be met with disbelief and disobedience. Here is quite an interesting run of words. Not all have “obeyed the gospel.” Obeyed the gospel? Why “obeyed”? Don’t we believe the gospel? Yes, we do. But a true believing of the gospel will obey the gospel’s invitations and commands. Those who do not believe disobey the gospel’s summons. See, what we offer is a salvation free to all – but in the imperative of a command. This is after all, GOD WHO INVITES – so to reject the invitation is to disobey the gospel summons and turn away from the God who commands.

This rejection of the gospel is not unexpected. Isaiah predicted that Israel would reject the suffering Servant, the sacrificial Lamb, the crucified Christ. The point here is once to again to show how and why Israel rejected Christ so that in later, in chapter 11, he can show how that brought riches to the Gentiles and how Jews will eventually be restored.

### **Its Foundational Principle**

**(v.17)**

Here is the conclusion. Faith then comes through hearing and hearing through the spoken (possibly preached) word of Christ. “Word” here is not Scripture, but rather the act of speaking, preaching, declaring. The word we say about faith (v.8) is also the word we say about Christ (v.17). In the context, Paul is pointing to the speaking about Christ and the calling for faith (trust, believing God in an obeying way) as how God imparts the faith to believe. In other words, our preaching, witness, speaking about Christ is the way God gives faith as well as being what faith believes.

In all the Scriptures, while the ultimate determination and initiative is on God’s part, the means to those ends is always, always upheld. So, God has chosen whom He will save (Romans 9) and that He will save them through their hearing the gospel and believing in Christ (Romans 10).

### **Their Rejection of God**

**(v.18-21)**

Israel’s unbelief and rejection is proof that salvation is by faith. So, Paul counters two untruths about why Israel has rejected the Messiah.

### **Availability of the Gospel**

**(v.18)**

So is the problem then that Israel just hasn’t heard? No. All Israel (the “they” here) heard because, if the revelation of God has gone throughout the world through creation, how much more then has the gospel through preaching. The problem then is that they were ignorant and did not know to believe.

### **Responses to the Gospel**

**(v.19-21)**

Well then, is the problem that they didn’t understand? The answer is actually in the last phrase – it is not they just didn’t get it, they were stubborn and hard-hearted, that is, dis-

obedient and contrary. The quote from Deuteronomy 32:21 and Isaiah 65:1 shows that Israel ought to have understood – that is, they are accountable. It also shows that God an agenda and a purpose that He is accomplishing. The truth and principles in these verses are expounded on and explained in Romans 11. So the argument of Paul keeps pressing relentlessly on. Are we breathless? Yes. Will we set ourselves to listen and learn? Yes, we will.

Yet, here is a great surprise. While Israel is condemned as unbelieving, God has been stretching out an inviting hand to a disobedient and stubborn people (v.21). Why are they here said to be *disobedient* instead of characterizing them as *unbelieving*? Because Paul has been sent to procure the *obedience of faith* and those who seek establish their own righteousness *do not submit to Christ's righteousness*. It confirms that Paul expects faith and obedience to go hand in hand. It warrants our defining faith as “believing God in an obeying way.” Unbelief yields disobedience. So Israel is stubborn and disobedient in her unbelief.

## Conclusion

Thus the invitation in the gospel is to believe and bow. It is truly surrender to a Sovereign and trusting on the only Savior. And that is the invitation of this preacher and the gospel and this church to you this morning – acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and believe the gospel. Call on Him today – and you will be saved from sin.



# The Gospel: Prospects of Mercy for Israel

## Romans 11:1-32

### Text

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? (1 Ki 19:10) 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." 4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." (Is 29:10) 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; 10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever." (Ps 69:22-23)

11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. 19 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; 27 and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Is 59:20-21; Jn 4:22; Hb 8: 8-10)

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Deu 29:29) <sup>34</sup> " For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"<sup>35</sup> "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" (Is 40:13) <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Israel's rejection is neither total (v.1-10) nor is it final (v.11-24). (Moo, *Romans*, p.683). **Introduction**  
Thus God moves in His electing love to save His people. He places them the all on an equal footing of disobedience and damnation (v.25-32). In this way, His glory is ever more illuminated by the marvelous wisdom by which He moves through time and history to gather up His elect into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (v.33-36).

Are we so self-centered (love as making much of us) that we cannot rejoice in the awesome love of God to save others? Is our experience of the love of God primarily in that He makes much of me? So can we quiver with joyous resonation as God makes much of Himself when He highlights His saving love for others? In other words – why do we care about this text when it doesn't seem relevant to us?

The challenge in a text like this is that it does not resonate with us. Some have an academic interest because they think it answers certain eschatological questions. Nor is it that we should love this text and its truths just because – well, because it is the Bible. I confess that it was not until Friday afternoon that my heart's bell was rung by this text and I hope that sound will come out in the preaching. So, I call you to–

- Love a God so faithful that He will not let His people go.
- Adore a God so loving He chooses sinners to save all over the world all through history right up until His appearing.
- Acclaim a God whose wisdom and ways are so stunning that they draw out our small, self-centered souls to an enlarged savoring and sharing of such a Savior and Sovereign.

In other words, love your God through this text. It is in the end, about the greatness of His wisdom and ways unfolding in salvation history.

## **In the Believing Remnant**

**(v.1-6)**

There is a present mercy to Israel so that a remnant are saved by faith.

### **Its Personal Illustration**

**(v.1)**

Paul himself as a believing Jew, illustrates that God has not rejected Israel. He identifies himself according to his Abrahamic (ethnic) descent and his tribe. He is clearly waving around his Jewish credentials. So God has not totally rejected the Jews because God has saved Paul, a Jew. In this way, Paul begins to make a case that the rejection of the Jews that is not total and not final is reversed in a restoration of Jews through salvation. He himself is a case in point.

### **Its Historical Parallel**

**(v.2-4)**

Paul makes an assertion on which he grounds his own personal illustration and from which he moves into a historical parallel. God has not rejected, thrust away or pushed

away His people. No, He saves them. He reserves them to Himself and causes them to bow their knee to Him.

But that remnant may not be a large or visible group. Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19 to show how God had a remnant, even in the dark and evil days when Ahab and Jezebel squatted like toads on the royal throne of David. Elijah, the prophet of God during that day, experienced the great victory on Mount Carmel and fell almost immediately afterward into self-pity and self-destruction. He felt he was all alone. He was the only one who bowed to God. But God had reserved 7,000 men who had not bowed to Baal because they loved and worshipped God.

So the current remnant may not be visible or prominent to us, particularly in days of persecution and trouble.

### **Its Present Certainty**

**(v.5-6)**

And it was just like that in Paul's day. Though it might look like God had rejected and abandoned Israel completely, Paul says that there is a remnant. And it seems that God intends for us to understand there will always be a remnant of believing, saved Jews. How do I know that? The certainty rests in two clear facts.

- They were chosen by God. Election then is a basis for confidence, hope and assurance. God's electing purpose keeps hope for His people alive. This means that God has taken the initiative to select and save His people, that is, those whom He loves among the Jews.
- God's choice is by grace. It is God's sheer grace that chooses and calls and completes salvation. No one deserves it. No one can earn it. And no one gets it just by being a Jew.

Why does Paul make this point? Because he wants once again to highlight the grace of God over against works (v.6). If God's choice is according to grace, then it cannot be based on any works – especially any works man does or even a work of faith that God would foresee. Grace and works are mutually exclusive grounds for God's choice in election. If God choose by grace those (in the context, the remnant – the small band of those Jews) who would be saved, then He did not choose based on their works. If he did, then grace is not what the Bible claims it is.

### **Its Biblical Proof**

**(v.7-10)**

First there is a *SUMMARY* of what he has shown before (v.7). Israel as a nation failed to get what it wanted, but the elect within were saved as a remnant and the rest were hardened. Here Paul points back to his discussion in Romans 9 using the same language.

Then he quotes the *SCRIPTURES* that support his argument (v.8-10). The focus of these quotes is to show that God is the initiator (v.8) and the planner (v.9-10) of their stumbling, their hardening, their present general state of rejection. This present hardening is not surprising given Psalm 69. In fact, the stanza just before the one cited points to and was cited by, Jesus on the cross. They rejected their King so their King rejects them, turning even their good things into the instruments of their destruction.

## Through their Future Restoration

(v.11-32)

This long section has three important purposes:

- It serves to shape Israel's hope of a future restoration.
- It serves to show how God's wise purposes and providences oscillate between Jewish hardening to Gentile salvation to Israel's restoration.
- It serves to warn Gentiles of arrogance, pride and elitism thus spurring them to preach the gospel to all and to receive all.

Because these three purposes are woven throughout, this text is very complicated and in some respects, repetitious. Paul is arguing that Jews are rejected so that Gentiles may be saved so that Jews will really be saved (restored). Hence, the Gentiles must not be proud and the Jews must have hope.

This is one of those texts where there are large redemptive-historical implications. For many, this text is understood through a dispensational lens where the hope and restoration is that of an Old Testament monarchy under Christ and a return to national and ethnic prominence. But, this is not really what it says. Notice that at each major point, it is their salvation, their belief, their inclusion that is in view. The restoration here is that of accepting Jesus Christ as Messiah who has risen from the dead and ascended to take the seat on David's throne and who is moving toward the day when the inauguration of the Kingdom will be brought to its consummation. You see, the fundamental mistake that was being made by the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day and is being made by many today is to locate the promises and prophecies in an earthly land and kingdom. The New Testament writers locate the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies in Christ. It is all gathered up in Him.

Now let's look together at this intricate shaping of Israel's future restoration – a hope in large-scale salvation.

### Its Intricate Purpose

(v.11-16)

Here the movement is that of Jewish trespass leading to Gentile salvation. Gentile salvation leads to Jewish jealousy and thus, some are saved.

God designed this in order to make the Jews jealous (v.11-13). Their trespass brought the riches of salvation to the Gentiles all over the world, then what great riches there are when there is a fullness of Jews being saved.

Paul aimed in his ministry to make his fellow Jews jealous (v.14-16.) If this is God's design, then Paul would follow God's design and make much of his own ministry to the Gentiles so that the Jews would desire what they did not have and obtain it by grace – by being saved. And if their present rejection means Gentile reconciliation, then how much greater will their acceptance be – in fact it will be life from the dead – it will be resurrection.

Caution – too much detail, too much “this is that”, may kill the point of this next sentence. Paul may be simply transitioning from one paragraph - lump and loaf being holy (v.11-16) to next paragraph -root and branch (v.17-24) without identifying who the lump and who the loaf are. The point is that there is an integral unity between the two – lump and loaf, root and branch that he builds on in the following paragraph. That unity means

that holiness in one secures or guarantees holiness in the other. It is my proposal that the loaf and the root/stem are Christ.

### **Its Practical Illustration**

**(v.17-24)**

The illustration itself is drawn from agriculture. It is the familiar idea of grafting into one plant the branches of another in order to produce a hybrid fruit, a new kind of plant (in the resulting seed or flower) or to revitalize the branch through the fresh living sap of the root and trunk. Paul alludes to the process of trimming off a branch in order to create a place where the new branch will be grafted in. It is not always done that way – a notch may be cut in the stem or trunk with the graftling inserted there.

Though many would see the Olive Tree in this illustration as being Israel, it seems to me that is something being read back into the text because of the Bible's use of the olive tree to represent Israel elsewhere. It seems to me that Paul is using the tree here to represent the people of God united to Christ. Christ is the root and stem, the trunk. The natural branches are Israel and the wild branches are the Gentiles. The breaking off is unbelief breaking the union with the people of God. The grafting in is about union with Christ and the people of God by faith. Remember, in the context, Paul has been primarily concerned to show how disbelief is a part of God's rejection of national Israel, while salvation by faith unites to Christ and His Kingdom people.

This illustration highlights several key points in Paul's thinking about salvation history – Paul's eschatology.

- We see that God is interested to show the glory of His grace through faith and to mark out how destructive unbelief is. Israel is severed (and the Gentiles may be as well) because of unbelief.
- We understand that God is demonstrating two sides of His character – His kindness and severity. His kindness is manifested in those He saves and His severity in those He condemns. We must never minimize these two lest we lose the power of the Gospel and disfigure the image of God.
- We are pointed to the design and purpose of God once again. While cutting off of one leads to the engrafting of another, those engrafted are vulnerable to being broken off so that God may extend His power to once again engraft the natural branches.

Finally, we are warned, the Gentile people of God whom He has moved to save, not to become proud of our status, but to stand in awe of our Savior (v.20). I see an important principle here – pride destroys worship. When we make much of ourselves, we cannot make much of God.

## Its Humbling Mystery

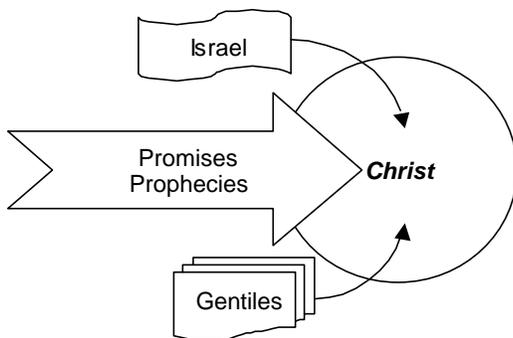
(v.25-27)

To protect us further from our conceited elitism that would look down on the Jews who had rejected God, Paul tells us about a mystery. Now a mystery in the Bible is a truth that has been hidden in the past but is now being revealed, usually with Christ Himself as the key. This mystery is designed to humble all of us before the amazing wisdom and awesome love of God. It is to impel us outward to a wide and broad evangelism to all.

Now I must ask you to bear with me for a bit of exegetical detail. Too often, this text is read as though it says, “a partial hardening happens until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, *then* all Israel will be saved.” This reading of the text is a framework being forced on the text – a framework that sees God as working now in the Gentiles as a shift, parenthesis, or second, parallel track in God’s plan with a future return to God’s primary track with Israel. So the times of the Gentiles runs from the captivity (Daniel) to the rapture, *then* God returns to working with Israel and she is restored.

The problem with this is that it is not what the text says. Most modern translations get it right. As the ESV says, “In this way all Israel...” and the NIV, “And so all Israel...”. Here is how I understand what Paul is saying here. A partial hardening describes the present state of ethnic Israel. But all true Israel by election will be saved along with the full number of the Gentiles. And there will be a large ingathering of Jews near the end of the age according to the rest of Romans 11. I believe I am being honest with the text – and I know of no other way to have both the “until” and the “in this way”. So God is gathering up His people until all the elect are gathered in, including the fullness of the Gentiles and the true Israel among the Jews, yes, even a large number at the end when the broken branch is grafted back in, they are accepted once again.

This will all happen just at the time when the Deliverer comes to banish ungodliness from Jacob for He will fulfill His covenant and take away their sins – that is, *THEY WILL BE SAVED*.



So all that God has promised and all that was prophesied is fulfilled in Christ. Thus we together receive its fulfillment, for we have been placed in Christ.

## Its Underlying Principles

(v.28-32)

For the sake of time and space, let me just briefly capture for you these underlying principles.

*THEIR PRESENT DUAL STATUS* – Paul shows us that ethnic Israel are enemies for the sake of the gospel, but elect Israel are loved and saved for the sake of the patriarchs. Thus God

moves to bring about His purposes in salvation-history while upholding His faithfulness to keep all His promises to the patriarchs.

*THE PERFECT CHARACTER OF GOD* – God’s character is underscored because He is faithful to the patriarchs and doesn’t go back on what He has given and whom He has called. You can bank on God. In the midst of Jewish transgression and Gentile salvation leading to Jewish jealousy and their salvation, God will glorify every one He has chosen, called and justified. Nothing then can separate us from God’s love and the long reach of His mercy.

*THE OUTWORKING OF SALVATION HISTORY* – God will accomplish what He has set out to do – to glorify Himself by calling out the people of His love so that He will be seen to be large in their lives and in the flow of history. He will work with elaborate planning and exquisite execution so that just when the end comes, the fullness of the Gentiles comes in alongside of a great ingathering of the Jews.

*THE OVERARCHING DESIGN OF GOD* – Verse 32 shows what that arch is: all under disobedience so that all may be subject to mercy. Here is where two all’s in one sentence cannot mean the same thing or you have universalism. All- that is every individual is consigned to disobedience so that all, without distinction, Jew and Gentile, may receive mercy.

## **From an Immeasurable Wisdom**

**(v.33-36)**

And here is our response. To the intricate details of doctrine we respond with incredible declarations of doxology. As John Piper reminded us on Friday, “All our doctrine of God must bring us to delight in God.” John Owen also called us to “delight in the God of the doctrines for which we contend.” Paul’s missions statement to the Philippians was to strive “for their progress and joy in the faith so that they may have ample opportunity to glory in Christ Jesus.” So truth fuels affections – doctrine under girds doxology.

### **Its Exclamation**

**(v.33)**

The danger here is that a too close examination of the text will press our noses so closely to the painting that we will not see nor experience its beauty. Frankly, this is a spontaneous burst of acclaim for the immeasurable riches, wisdom and knowledge of God. Thus, what I want to call for is simply to resonate with this in your soul – to exclaim to yourself – to say it with delighted wonder to your neighbor – to sing in words and music to your God.

Not just so that we will have the experience of worship and doxology as something sought or scripted. Rather we will pursue God, see His great character and mighty ways and praise and acclaim will rise from astonished wonder. This is why I called you in Romans 11 to make much of God in the marvel of His saving love.

### **Its Explanation**

**(v.34-35)**

Paul wraps his doxology around the Scriptures, quoting from Isaiah 40:13. This chapter in Isaiah is a rich tapestry of the majestic might and everlasting exaltedness of God. No one can tell Him how things ought to be. And no one can obligate Him to do what He has not purposed to do. No one can put God in their debt. God is utterly free in His grace and

His mercy. God is not subject to the critique or criticism of mere mortals, of dust, of jars of clay.

### **Its Exultation**

**(v.36)**

Why? Because God is the source of all things. God is the sustainer of all things. And is the supreme end and object of all things. Therefore, He is worthy of being magnified – of our recognition of His glory and ascribing to Him the glory that is His due.

All hail the King, our mighty Ruler and our marvelous Redeemer who has moved with wonderful wisdom to make Himself the full and final satisfaction of all He has made us for. Believe in Him. Bow to Him. O, come let us adore Him, now and forever more, world without end.

# The Gospel: Our Relationships in the Church

## Romans 12:1-21

### Text

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**Introduction** Well, finally, we get to the practical parts of Romans that will be more relevant to my life. Particularly, let's get out of those difficult and dangerous portions in Romans 9-11. So here we are. Is this our approach? Is this how we think? Are we not in danger then of turning the gospel into mere relational ethics?

The gospel has two sides: you must bow to Christ and you must obey Christ – both by faith. You must learn the gospel (Ch.1-11) and you must live the gospel (Ch.12-16). It is a single coin with two sides – to reject either side is to lose the whole. We do not get on from the gospel to something else, we move on into and under and with gospel as to how it calls from an initial believe and bow to an ongoing believe and obey. This is why Romans 12:1 opens with *therefore*.

Warren Wiersbe points out that this is the fourth of the great *therefore*'s in Romans: Romans 3:20 is the *therefore* of condemnation; Romans 5:1 is the *therefore* of justification; Romans 8:1 is the *therefore* of assurance; here in Romans 12:1 we have the *therefore* of dedication. (Wiersbe, *BEC*, p.554.)

So, while there is a lot of along the valley floor rocks and grass here, I want you to see three major mountains that dominate the landscape in this text.

## **Its Godward Essentials**

**(v.1-2)**

There are two foundational responses to the gospel that shape and sustain our living of the gospel. I am convinced that:

- If you are unwilling to make these essential responses you have not understood the gospel, God's mercy and grace.
- You must make these essential commitments to make progress in what follows;
- You must not go around Romans 12:1-2 to get to the rest of the book and you must not sever Romans 12:1-1 from Romans 1-11.

What is needed to begin living the gospel?

## **A Sacrificial Presentation of our Bodies**

**(v.1)**

Paul couches this in terms of an appeal or an exhortation. What he calls for should weigh heavy on us because where he grounds it. Because of or through God's multiplied mercies to us, we ought to respond by presenting our bodies to God. This is a decisive act – there is an initial dedication of ourselves at our salvation that is constantly renewed in holiness and God-pleasing sacrifices day by day. Having presented yourself to God, be standing before God as a living sacrifice.

This is not talking about a dedication or rededication of ourselves after our salvation. That is simply another form of a second grace theology. Loved ones, when you believed and bowed, you decisively presented yourself to God and since in His mercies God saved you, then keep on standing before God (presenting yourself to God) as holy and approved for Him to use as He pleases. Where do I get this? Because the verb here is an *aorist, active infinitive*. In other words, continue (active infinitive) the fact of the past (aorist). Even if you do hold to a post conversion dedication, *the effect is still the same*. What I have to say from here on out through this text impacts on your responsibilities before God in the same way.

That we are to present ourselves, our bodies as living sacrifices gathers up the Old Testament story of Isaac and the death and resurrection of Jesus as its root themes. At the end of the day, what is being called for here is for us to be willing to live as a sacrifice – to die to our own agenda and live to serve God and His kingdom. Further, this living sacrifice is to holy and acceptable to God – it is to meet His standards and requirements.

We are to do this because this is how true rational or spiritual worship and service of God is defined. Worship is not just a Sunday event, it is the moment by moment stream of believing God in an obeying way – living obediently by grace.

## **A Transforming Renewal of our Minds**

**(v.2)**

Understand this: the gospel comes to us as an agent of change. It requires that we turn from self to our Savior, from worshipping and serving and being mastered by our idols to worshipping, serving and being mastered by God. The gospel is about how Christ through His death, resurrection and Spirit changes us from self-absorbed sinners to God-

besotted saints, that is, how the gospel conforms us to Christ. So there must be an obedience of faith in the gospel that is grounded in a commitment to change.

While it is easy to treat verses 1 and 2 as though they are parallel, verse 2 serves to expand on the “holy and acceptable to God” qualification of the living sacrifice. The body is presented worthily to God because the inward man has been radically transformed by a renewed mind and an exercised discernment. So, we do not have step 1 and step 2. We have the whole (v.1) of which (v.2) is the core.

Now let’s look at this a bit more closely.

The imperative here is *A SINGLE COMMAND* stated through two words: not conformed but transformed. We are not to be shaped by the world’s mold – its vision or values. This means that we must not conform to the idols of our own past – the world of our flesh and pre-salvation life. We must be undergoing a radical *metamorphosis* – a radical change into what God has designed and destined us for in Christ. There is a pattern of this age that seeks to master us and shape us. And there is the pattern of Christ whom we serve and by whom we are shaped.

This radical transformation is first, *AN INWARD ONE*. It has to do with rebuilding and renewing our minds. Paul elsewhere talks of bringing every thought captive to obedience of Christ. This inward mind renewal has two major aspects:

- The replacement of error with truth – the identifying of where we believe lies, myths and philosophies and replacing them with truth, doctrine and a Person, the Lord Jesus. This is our formal, “I believe in an obeying way” life statements.
- The renewal of our inner conversations – our “self-talk”. There is a constant inner stream of words by which we anticipate, experience and interpret life. This self-talk is either pleasing or displeasing to God – self-oriented or God-others oriented. It includes fantasies, inner debate, moral weighing, warnings from conscience. It is often unobserved and rarely closely analyzed. It is how what we believe informs our wills and shapes affections. It interacts with our wants and desires, either reinforcing them or reacting against them.

What is being called for here is a radical change in our thinking – its content and stream that leads to a radical change in our behavior.

The renewal of mind that transforms us both *VIEWES* and also *VALUES* God’s will. It *discerns* God’s will and *delights* in God’s will and *does* God’s will. We are not here talking about subjective leading in decision-making. We are talking about wisdom – knowing God’s Word, bringing to bear on our situation to illuminate it, interpret it and indicate the path of righteousness in it.

Now it is imperative for me to say this: you must know only view, discern or know what God’s will is, you must also value, delight or want God’s will. Many, many people clearly know what God’s Word says about life situations, but do not want or prize God’s will. Remember, our choices and emotions flow out of what we think and what we want. So to *discern* God’s will means that we *delight* in God’s will as good, acceptable and perfect.

## Its Ministry Focus

(v.3-8)

Now I have spent a lot of time with you on this first point because it is foundational. Let's begin to follow Paul's thinking as he shows us how our renewing of our minds begins with "thinking soberly about our gifts" (Stott, p.325). Carson says, "Paul's purpose in this paragraph is to foster unity among Christians by encouraging an attitude of humility and respect towards one another, particularly in the possession and use of spiritual gifts." (Carson, *NBC*, LLS)

## Honest Evaluation of Ourselves

(v.3)

The way of ministry is modeled for us. Paul speaks to us enabled by grace. Here is word ministry, counsel that comes through God's grace. Though some commentators see this as referring to his apostleship, it seems to me that Paul is demonstrating for us how we ought to do ministry.

In this reminder to us, he points out one of the great dangers facing us. We are very vulnerable to pride and its self-inflating affect on us. We tend think of ourselves as more important, more significant and more critical to life and ministry than we actually are. This arises from hearts that want to be served, honored and affirmed rather than hearts leaning towards grace enabled sacrificial love. The consequence of this danger is that we do ministry by the power of the flesh and human technique rather than by God's power.

What is called for is a serious self-examination that really aims to have an accurate self-assessment. That self-examination is in the light of the standard of faith – the content and control of what we believe. While some would say that this is faith as it is measured out to us, it seems to be more fitting in the light of self-examination to be the standard of measure that God has assigned – the ruler by which we measure ourselves. The point here is to keep us faith oriented rather than law oriented.

## Clear Understanding of Body Life

(v.4-5)

The analogy of the body is used to give us a clear understanding of body life – of giftedness in the church community. This analogy is the familiar way Paul thinks of ministry and giftedness. He uses it over and over again. If we are going to have an accurate assessment of our gifts and abilities, we must understand the plurality, diversity and yet essential oneness of our ministering together.

Just as I have arms and eyes and tongue, each part having its own function and yet each part connected to and sustained by the body as a whole, so we are each uniquely shaped and enabled by God to function in the body. Every one of you who are believers have some function, role and responsibility to fulfill. Yet this function is not independent of nor severed from Christ and the local body. We have this Spirit enabling by virtue of our union with Christ.

## Powerful Commitment to Grace Ministry

(v.6-8)

Paul goes on then with an *illustrative* list of some of the graces of the Spirit. We have gifts chosen by God and distributed to us by the Spirit. *You do not get to choose your gift*, you are responsible to exercise your gift. You should not desire another's gifts and you should not denigrate your own. I love the way Paul writes this, "Having been given what you have, use it."

The list here is not exhaustive – in fact, I do not believe there is an exhaustive list in the New Testament. This makes designing a spiritual gifts test somewhat difficult. A true spiritual gifts test is this: what can you do? What would you like to do? Will you do until the Spirit's enabling of you is confirmed by others?

Let's briefly consider these gifts. Paul begins with *prophecy*. This is the ability receive the Word directly from God and to speak it either in preaching or predicting. Though Spirit enabled, powerful, pointed, persuasive preaching of the Scriptures may be considered a gift of prophecy (and many Puritans believed that, as I do) the office of Prophet and the reception of a Word directly from God has ceased with the closing of the giving of Scripture. We reject the notion taught by Wayne Grudem of two levels of prophecy – one divinely authoritative that gave Scriptures and the other to be tested and accepted or rejected as such. I do not have the time to deal with this in detail this morning, but understand this – the Old and New Testament prophets are the same office fulfilled in Christ. The Apostles are unique in the New Testament. The New Testament is built on the foundation of Christ, laid by the Apostles and prophets who gave the Scriptures.

If a gift of prophecy continues today, it is limited to the authoritative preaching of God's Word *from the Bible*. There is no special, direct channel to God and no special revelation about the future. Any preaching today must measure up to the standard of the faith – the body of truth in the Scriptures.

Well, I have burned most of my time on this controversial gift. Let me quickly review the others. One of the things that stands out about most of these is that *what they are* is almost never explained. It is assumed that you will know these when you have them or are being ministered to by them. He shows us that these gifts come from God, are given to serve others and reflect the distinctions and unity we have since we are in Christ. Paul is not so concerned here to explain in detail what serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading (governing), or acts of mercy *are*, but how thinking accurately about ourselves shapes the *doing* of these gifts. The point here is in *how we do*.

So, if you serve, teach or exhort, do so in the sphere of the gift with opportunities you have according to the faith. If you give, do so generously. If you govern or lead or administrate, do so with passionate diligence. If you do acts of mercy, be joyful and cheerful in it. So Spirit enabled ministry should not be disconnected from Scripture, undisciplined or unstructured, nor stingy or minimalist, nor casual or lazy, nor grudging or joyless. Though ministry may be hard, it should never be exercised as though it were a hardship.

## **Its Authentic Love**

**(v.9-13)**

Sacrificial offering of our bodies and a transforming renewal of our thinking will be most tested in the persistence of our love. Dying to self, renewing our thinking for purity in living sets the rails on which an authentic love for others may run.

## **Framed within a Community Context**

This paragraph highlights the characteristics of a love for those within the community of faith. Our love for our brothers and sisters does not exclude that which characterizes our love for those outside – certainly we are to be lovingly engaged with one another as

verses 14-21 describe. But these characteristics are those most drawn out as we interact with our fellow believers in the church.

We must see then that the offering of our bodies as living sacrifices, the radical transformation through renewed minds, the careful, honest evaluation of our gifts and abilities, the exercise of our ministry among others must have love as its foundation. This connection of body life and love is evident in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as well. Our sacrifices and our serving are all shaped and sustained by authentic love.

## Shaped by Gracious Characteristics

John Stott is so helpful in showing how what appears to be a disjointed list of do's and don'ts relating to love is more than that. It is a beautiful composite picture of genuine, authentic love (Stott, *Romans*, p.330). Genuine love is characterized by:

- Sincere                    It is genuine and authentic, never forced or fake.
- Discerning                Hates evil and clings to good
- Affectionate              Has a godly believe/want generated emotion
- Honors                     Esteems, values and honors others
- Enthusiastic              Is zealous and fervent in a God-serving, God-oriented way.
- Joyful                      Serves and suffers well with a confident joy in a future hope
- Patient                     Is willing to wait in the midst of trouble and testing
- Prayerful                  Presses on in God-affirming prayer
- Generous                  Recognizes and meets needs of believers
- Hospitable                Has an open heart to others that is reflected in an open home.

How we ought to pray for grace to be this kind of people with this kind of love: sincere, pure, affectionate, honors, enthusiastic, joyful, patient, prayerful, generous and hospitable. This gracious love marks believers with humility and harmony (Stott, p.333).

Our relationships in our church – in the community of believers – requires self-sacrifice, radical transformation, grace-enabled use of gifts and powerfully authentic love. What an aim, what a vision statement this is for us together before God in this place. **Conclusion**

I want to drive the importance of this text home with a participant illustration.

*LET'S MAKE IT RAIN.* Left, Center and Right Sections

Sequence:     Rub palms – pat thighs – snap fingers – clap (up vol)

Sequence:     Clap (dn vol) – snap fingers – pat thighs – rub palms

Sacrifice, renew, exercise, love – for the glory of God

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# The Gospel: Our Responsibilities in this Age

## Romans 12:14-13:14

**Introduction** From the events of the last two months have emerged heroism and patriotism that most of us thought was long snuffed out. It has been a source of never ending wonder to many. And it will make what I am about to say much more difficult. One of the major issues that has faced us and will continue to face in the midst of a protracted war is, “Will we be more American than we are Christian?” Let me place the questions where I believe it squarely rests, “Are we more earthly patriots than heavenly citizens?” Will we now more shaped by our culture than by Christ and His cross?

Let me place before you what informs and shapes my thinking about this: I am a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), having sworn my allegiance to King Jesus for whom I wait His coming from heaven. I am a pilgrim, a sojourner, a stranger in a foreign land along with all of God’s people (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 2:11). We have an unshakeable Kingdom (Heb 12:28) not of this world (John 18:36) that demands our delighted submission, service and unquestioning allegiance. We are ambassadors of our King here (2 Cor. 5) to represent His authority and agenda – to call rebels to lay down the weapons of their warfare, to join in their allegiance to this King and to serve and follow this King with all their lives. This allegiance means that I will not be shaped by the culture and customs of this world, nor will I be enslaved to its fashions, fads, fantasies and fears. I will encourage you, my fellow pilgrims, to an unswerving allegiance to our King, even when that allegiance calls us to unpopular and possibly, persecution bringing decisions.<sup>4</sup>

So here we are, citizens of a Kingdom that is distant, not of this age and a yet coming King who must live here, now, in this age in this world among people who are rebels against our King under governments largely run by them. So here is our struggle and the clarity of this text: what are our responsibilities in the midst of this already and not yet?

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<sup>4</sup> For a parallel call, see John Piper’s sermon *The Limits of Submission to Man* preached at Bethlehem Baptist in 1981.

## Heaven's Citizens and the People around Us (12:14-21)

This is a very interesting paragraph because of its structure and its content. It points us towards serving and not retaliating. This is the private sphere of our interactions with people around us. I am not talking about the right and required responsibility of governments to exercise public justice. Paul is here talking about how we deal and respond to people as individuals around us.

- A. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
  - B. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.
  - C. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
    - D. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
  - c. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
  - b. To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."
- a. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The structure helps us understand the relationship between the parts and how Paul brings us to the core idea. In all our relationships with people in the world around us, as heaven's citizens, as much as it depends on us, we are to live peaceably with all. Why? Because we are responsible to proclaim and pattern ourselves after the King of Salem, the King of peace.

## Our Guiding Principles

(v.14,21)

These two texts define our responses in the face of difficult relationships and opposition. We are to respond with blessing rather than cursing because we are aiming to overcome evil with good. When we face pressure, opposition and persecution, we want to respond with grace, charity and goodness. We do not want our words or our ways to be primarily about defending ourselves, but about representing God.

Now this is not to say that evil cannot be opposed. It is to face evil with truth, to resist evil. But we must do so ever mindful that we are foreign citizens and the manner and customs of this world are alien. We are to speak for God and to oppose evil – but we must never become or practice evil in doing so. I find so often here in America that the words we use and the way we go about opposing abortion and homosexuality – both great, God denying, life destroying evils – our opposing of them becomes evil itself.

One final note – one thing that strikes me in the New Testament is the almost total absence of activism against national, cultural evils. Believe me, Rome had them – abortion, pedophiles, homosexuality, you name it. The New Testament writers acknowledge that those evils are there – but their concern is that Christians be pure of those evils. It frankly, in my own mind, calls into question much of American Christian activism.

## **Our Loving Practices**

**(v.15-16,20)**

These sets of verses describe for us how we move towards the world to engage it with Christ's love. We empathize with those who rejoice and weep. We may do so in the same conversation. We try to live in harmony with others – trying to establish relational bridges across which to send the gospel. We love and live with a spreading the gospel of God agenda and intentionality. In humility, we cross cultural and economic and ethnic divides to move towards those who are lost without the gospel. As citizens of heaven we must not be arrogant and aloof and distant. We ought rather to demonstrate the humbly joyous self-forgetfulness of our King.

In the context of a true enemy (v.20), love moves to meet their basic need for food and drink. According to Proverbs 25:21-22 from which this is cited, the effect is to “pour coals of fire on his head and to be rewarded by the Lord.” There is much discussion over what is meant by the enigmatic statement. It seems to me that our deeds of good to personal enemies have the effect of making them more aware of their guilt. It is not personal pain but an afflicted conscience and God's verdict that is aroused. Now we do not do these things in order to cause this – the Bible is describing its effect – but rather out of an authentic and persistent love.

Why do we do this? Not just because it is commanded here – but because this is what Christ did in His life here and what God does in His common grace every day. Sinners are God's enemies, hostile to Him, His Kingdom and will. Yet God provides them food and shelter and all sorts of good things in life. Yet, at the end of the day, their very ungratefulness for God's goodness is called in as a witness against them (Romans 2:4-5).

## **Our Self-denying Prohibitions**

**(v.17,19)**

What we must do is contrasted with and replaces what we must not do. This is wrapped in two clear statements that we need to pay very careful attention to.

We must not repay evil in kind, giving attention to what is honorable in the culture. This is so important. We have an enormous capacity to justify the evil we do to someone else because of the evil they have done to us. We should be paying attention to how we respond to people whose culture is different from our own. It is so easy to take and offense and give an offenses when the customs are different.

In verse 19, we are brought to a very hard text for many people. We must never exact our own vengeance against others. Revenge for a Christian is simply not allowed. This is certainly true in the larger sin arenas – but it is also true in the little, day-by-day irritations and aggravations of living with sinners. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, neighbors, work – in all these relationships we strike back in small and sometimes larger ways. God calls us to be patient until the day He makes all things right. And He warns us that when we seek revenge we are taking the place of God, usurping His long patient, high and holy justice with our own petty demands for immediate resolution.

## **Our Shaping Purpose**

**(v.18)**

Why can we live and love like this? Because Christians are to be people of peace, not strife. Since this is not our true homeland, since we are here as ambassadors, we are here

to pray, proclaim and plead for reconciliation. While we fight sin, we aim to see sinners converted.

This verse also recognizes that sometimes living peaceably is not possible. It will not depend on us. It will depend on others. Others may cause strife and bring personal war – but we must still respond with grace and love.

So Christians are a people who move towards others with blessing (v.14), empathy (v.15), harmony and humility (v.16) and a public willingness to be wronged for Christ's sake. And when the world moves against us we respond with peaceableness (v.18), no revenge (v.19), goodness (v.20) and with victory defined by God's terms and agenda (v.21).

## **Heaven's Citizens and the Government over Us (13:1-7)**

In view of our aim to live peaceably with all men and to overcome evil with good, how are heaven's citizens supposed to relate to earthly governments? Now, Paul is writing these words in a time when all Christians would have been living under governments that would not have been influenced at all by Biblical principles. Yet he clearly outlines our attitudes and our responsibilities to human governments as heaven's citizens.

### **The State as a God Ordained Authority (v.1-3)**

The emphasis in these verses is on the state as an authority ordained by God by His power. The imperative then is that we are to be subject to the governments God place over us. Why are we to do this? Paul gives us several compelling reasons.

1. All authority spheres are defined and described by God. Thus God Himself is the overarching authority within which governments operate – God initiated and installed human government after the great Flood. So governments have authority, not by sheer physical power, but by Divine decree.
2. The authorities that are in place are there by God's design, decree and providential placing. No government comes into place apart from God's sovereign will and all governments that come into being emerge from the decrees of His hidden will.
3. Those who resist and rebel against the governing authorities resist and rebel against God. When we resist and rebel against God, we are subject to the correcting and judging hand of God.

So, Christians are to do good and not evil. Good governments will support and defend its good citizens and restrain and punish its bad ones. Bad governments may not function as they were designed to by God, but that does not give Christians the right to do evil just because the government is bad. Do we trust in our God or do we not? Will we live as citizens of heaven here where we fully expect that fallenness and sin will twist the good design of God into dangerous and despicable powers?

Now it is imperative that this text not be made to stand alone. No authority may command or compel a Christian to disobey God. So Peter and Paul and a long host of Christians have stood before evil rulers and declared that they must obey God. But they were submissive as they bore with joy the punishments meted out, seeing the suffering and martyrdom as a privilege. So while at times we must disobey when ordered to do evil, we will be submissive as we humbly accept the persecution that comes.

## **The State as a God Employed Servant (v.4-7)**

The emphasis in these verses is on the state as a servant employed by God for His purposes. God has designed the state to carry out certain functions. When the state operates within these functions, they serve God's purpose and the good of their citizens. When they do not, then they can become a danger to a people. One of the primary functions of government is to implement justice and to carry the sword. The state is to punish evildoers even up to capital punishment. It is to carry the sword of public justice. War is a legitimate function of carrying the sword. So Christians who were converted while in the Roman army could stay in the army and fight for Rome. In fact, Paul in verse 4, sees the bearing of the sword by the state as a weapon of God's own wrath. This draws from a rich variety of texts in the Old Testament prophets where God used foreign and evil nations to execute His justice and wrath against both His own people and against other nations.

I want to point out again that Paul is writing under a horribly evil government and to people under a horribly evil government. We cannot therefore say from verse 4 that governments that do not serve God's good are illegitimate and not to be submitted to and possibly even overthrown. So, we are to be subject to the governing authorities, not just to maintain a clear conscience before God, but also not to put ourselves in the way of God's wrath.

Finally, Paul gives illustrative examples of areas where we may be tempted to respond wrongly to the state. We are to pay our taxes. We are to respect our leaders. We are to honor the government, not because government is of the people, by the people and for the people – but because government is of God, for His purposes and our good. Government is not by the consent of the governed, but by the ordination of God.

Now there is no way to answer all the “what if...” scenarios people can come up with – what about a German Christian under Hitler? What about Christians in the Sudan or in Iraq? Should Christians have been involved in the American Revolution? I want to suggest that while we go to great lengths in our churches and religious schools to teach God and America – we do not equip ourselves for the very responsibilities and responses that actually do honor God. We have not even begun to explore that text in Timothy that tells us we ought to pray for governing authorities so that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives. What I want to plead for this morning is that we stop being primarily Americans and that we primarily be Christians who live in America – that we affirm our allegiance to heaven and our love for others and our submission to the government placed over us by God's wise and good providences.

## Heaven's Citizens and the Lifestyle required of Us (13:8-14)

Paul's transitions are lovely in their neatness. We owe honor, respect and taxes to government, but the debt to love is always to be outstanding. That love is expressed in a walk with God in purity and holiness.

### Its Law Fulfilling Love

(v.8-10)

Notice how this paragraph is bracketed by love as fulfilling the Law. He begins with the *PERSON* in view – the one who loves fulfills the Law. He closes with the *PRINCIPLE* in view – love is the fulfillment of the Law. All that the 2<sup>nd</sup> table of the Law requires would be met by those who loved their neighbor out of love for God.

Now I see two very important implications:

- Love and holiness are inseparable if not indistinguishable. God does not have to think about keeping the Law. He loves in such a way that all His interactions within Himself and with others is absolutely holy. So there is no such thing as true love that is impure or unholy. People may fornicate, live together or commit adultery – but by definition what they do cannot be loving because it is unholy.
- Love is more than a motivation to do what is right – it is very doing of what is right. This is why Paul can say, “all that matters is faith working by love”. Though love has an emotional component, it is primarily thinking and wanting what God thinks and wants for God and for others.
- Holiness without love is a sham. Love without holiness is a lie. This is why the Pharisees and all like them are so dangerous. It is possible to appear pleasing to God while not having and living a holiness *the way God does*. Thus, it is hypocritical and harmful.

So heaven's citizens live in earth's fallenness as people who love and whose love looks like holiness.

### Its Eschatological Urgency

(v.11-12)

All that we have learned this morning about being heaven's citizens has an urgency driven by the already and not yet. There is an urgency to the need for wakefulness (v.11) and holiness (v.13) because our final salvation is nearer now than when we became heaven's citizens.

The primary function of eschatology – its teaching and its hearing is that we might be a holy people. When we know that the King is near and the time is short and all that we tend to prize in this world will soon vanish, then what kind of people ought we to be? A people marked by a holy urgency.

### Its Christ-Centered Purity

(v.13-14)

So while the day is dawning but not yet here, let us live as children of that light. The word *walk* here is what we would call *lifestyle*. May our lives be characterized by the light of heaven's kingdom and not the darkness of sin's domain.

He describes what that domain is like – sensual, sexual, self-indulgent, strife, self-seeking and self-serving. Not just in occasional passing deeds, but in characteristic ways

of living. So heaven's citizens lifestyles are to be in marked contrast to those of the world. We all agree that we should not be wrapped up in sensuality and sexual profligacy. But are our lifestyles marked by conflict and covetousness? Moi? Us? Christians? No, never!

But we are to put on Christ and not provide for fleshly lusts.

Here the positive is stated first. Paul uses this construct to remind us that those who have been placed into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27) who is the new self in whose image we are being renewed day by day (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). In other words Christians are to be becoming what they are – we are being transformed into the image of Christ having been placed into union with Him and having been clothed in Him, His righteousness.

Then we have the responsibility to identify our wants, cravings, inward ruling desires – our heart idols, adulteries and masters – as well as our bodily vulnerabilities and habitual responses and do not provide for opportunities for them to be fulfilled. This is Romans 6 – you are dead to sin and so stop presenting yourself and yielding yourself to its control. You begin by serving your desires until you become the slave of your desires. The gospel and the power of the cross and resurrection comes to free us – so do not reenter that slavery.

The particulars of how a Christian obeys verse 14 are unique and different among believers. Some will have to guard against some things quite carefully that seem to have almost no affect on others. So while attitudes and actions of sin are sin for all, the particular ways we have of being made in Christ's image and the details of how we guard against sin varies greatly. It is sad that we become more caught up in those details, than in encouraging, equipping and exhorting one another in what is truly vital.

**Conclusion** What a humble, holy, wise, loving, gentle, generous, submissive and heavenward longing band are these pilgrims, these foreigners, these citizens of God's Kingdom. Will you join them? If you have, will you be like them now until the King comes?



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# The Gospel: Our Responses in Matters of Conscience

## Romans 14:1-15:7

Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!  
It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!

It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.

*Psalms 133*

**Introduction** Here is the problem we face as a people called out of all nations and all cultures. How can we function as one in the midst of our diversity? How were the Christians in Rome, some of whom were converted Jews reared in Judaism and the rest of whom were converted Gentiles reared in Paganism – how are they to sit down together at the Agape Feast? Some would be bringing in pork and some wine to drink – while for others the food should be kosher and wine was forbidden. You see, there is a very practical problem of dealing with issues that weren't doctrinal yet were very difficult practically.

Today, we face many of these same kinds of issues. We call them things that are in gray areas. How do we function as one when some of you really are uncomfortable without a tie at church and some are coming in shorts? How about earrings, ponytails and so on? What about Christmas trees and celebrating mother's day at church? What about serving wine instead of or along-side of grape juice – or just grape-juice?

And we are a relatively mono-culture church – I pray that God would give us the opportunity to more reflect in our membership the scene around heaven's throne – we are not challenged very much as we could be.

Paul has been arguing for the essential oneness of Jew and Gentile – in sin, in salvation, in sanctification, under God's sovereignty, in service – now, it comes to a head in whether they will function according to the doctrine they have learned. How do I know that? Because this long pericope ends in Romans 15:9-12 by celebrating God's purpose of unity for Jew and Gentile in Christ.

So, let us read the text this morning. Then I want to follow the flow of argument as Paul has located it in the text. But I want to spend some of our time this morning, working through a diagram – a chart – of this text that helps to think in terms of principles and applications. One other point – there is a companion text in 1 Corinthians that articulates other principles not given here. So, our study this morning is not all that is to be said about how we function

in liberty – for example, it does not address at all what we do when we are different in our opinions and are in the presence of unbelievers.

<< READ TEXT >>

## Its Positive Precepts

(14:1-2)

Let's begin by thinking our way through the text with Paul. As I have said, this text addresses a problem in the church at Rome – how are Jews and Gentiles to be one when they are so different in their personal preferences.

### What is Required

Those who are weak in faith are to be welcomed or received – accepted. This is the core precept. Differences of opinion about certain lifestyle issues are not to be the grounds for rejection and division. Furthermore, they are to be received but not to quarrel over opinions. In other words, these differences that he will elaborate on are not to be the source of arguments, debates, cliques and so on.

### Who are the Weak

The ones who are to be received are those who are weak in faith. Verse 2 tells us that the weak are those who only eat vegetables and do not eat meat. The weak have self-imposed rules for living that the strong do not have *that are not related to moral issues*.

Stott writes, “We are not to envisage a vulnerable Christian easily overcome by temptation but a sensitive Christian full of indecision and scruples. What the weak lack is not strength of self-control but liberty of conscience.” (Stott, *Romans*, p.355). We are to see in this text, primarily Jewish believers whose upbringing in the Law and exposure to Judaistic asceticism meant they had lots of rules and do's and don'ts. So weak in faith are not weak in doctrine, but whose faith is not strong in Christian liberty. The weak are the ones who have a lot of rules and regulations for their walk with God. Seems backward, doesn't it. While we must be very careful about sin, we must not elevate our personal preferences to the level of being sin for all.

### What it is Not

Now this tells us then that Paul is not creating a refuge for evildoers, legalists, Pharisees who use their narrow views or even this text to require and compel others to agree with their views. In fact, legalism is the clear enemy of liberty of conscience.

It also tells us that Paul is not here talking about liberty in doctrine, per se. Romans 14-15 is not a refuge for those who are a-theological nor for those who hold to error. In the text itself, it is about personal preferences whose practice has some Biblical justification. We will make the broader applications to our day, later.

## Its Negative Prohibitions

(14:3-23)

I want to present these as an exquisite piece of jewelry – multiple, linked settings of silver and gold of what we ought to do in which is a centerpiece of why we ought to do it.

## Vulnerability to Mutual Disregard (v.3-12)

Paul begins with the primary problem that plagues our differences.

### Its Typical Expression

- Those with stronger consciences despise and look down on those with more sensitive consciences. Those who are free have a superior attitude and treat others with unloving condescension.
- Those with weaker consciences denounce and condemn those with strong consciences. All of their rules for their own personal holiness become the standard by which others are judged.

Therefore, those who are free are to honor and protect the weaker, not looking down on them. Those who are weaker must not impose their rules and regulations on others, evaluating their spirituality on a self-imposed standard.

### Its Biblical Correction

Paul supports this with major challenges to way we think and want – areas in which we must examine ourselves and repent. These are not just random thoughts, but rather are a logical development, a progression of

- God has received them and thus He is their master (v.3-4) It is not right to look down on or to judge the performance of another servant over whom you do not have authority. Paul places this in the context of dietary regulations.
- We live under the Lordship of Christ to honor and glorify Him, not ourselves (v.5-9). Paul adds the context of celebrating special days (probably, Jewish feast days). Each one is to be firmly convinced in his own mind and thus aims his practice to honor and glorify Christ. Pleasing Christ is each person's aim. And both practices can and do please Christ *even though they are different*. The reason is that our lives are not self-oriented (my individual sanctification) but Christ oriented, pleasing Him in all we do.
- We will give an account to Christ (v.10-12). Since this paragraph begins with reminding both parties of their sinful tendencies then this is being addressed to both. There is a very real sense in which Paul points us away from being accountable to one another in these areas.

So, we are not to despise or condemn one another in these areas because we serve and are accountable to God, who is our master, Lord and righteous Judge.

## Vulnerability to Mutual Destruction (v.13-23)

The next two paragraphs speak to the practice of our liberty, describing those attitudes and priorities that govern practical choices and conduct.

### In our Private Interactions (v.13-19)

In our private relationships, there is the possibility of causing harm to the weak in faith (v.13-19). We must not destroy or grieve others by causing them to actively violate their conscience (stumbling/hindrance) (v.15). Paul, one of those who are strong in faith, says that nothing in and of itself is ceremoniously unclean in Old Tes-

tament categories (v.14). For the weak, their conscience renders the thing unclean for them and the strong, they must practice their freedom so as not to cause what is OK to be denounced as evil. Overarching all this, Kingdom priorities of love (v.15), righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit (v.17-18) motivate us to serve Christ in a way that is acceptable to Him and approved by others. Our primary pursuit is not self-serving insistence on our preferences but on the pursuit of corporate peace and mutual edification.

### **In our Public Contexts**

**(v.20-23)**

Second there is the possibility of causing harm to the work of God (v.20-23). In what we do in public ministry contexts must not cause people to violate their consciences. And those with weaker consciences must not violate them. If they doubt, they must not partake and those who have faith, must graciously accept, provide and support them.

This is not to say that what is allowed is sink to the level of the most sensitive conscience in the congregation. What is required of all, however, must not require and force those with sensitive consciences to actively participate. So the Gentile believers are not to make Jewish believers eat pork at the Agape Feast, but pork can be brought to be enjoyed by those who were free to do so.

In all these areas, there is a very simple question that we must ask ourselves: do I question that practice for myself? Do I have doubts? Does it bother me to do that? Then DON'T. When you do, you sin. But if, under instruction, your conscience becomes Biblically taught and you no longer doubt, then you may. And if you have questions, don't condemn others who are free. You who are free, help the weak to please God by encouraging them not to violate their consciences nor putting them in positions where they have to.

### **Its Shaping Principles**

**(15:1-7)**

This is one of those very poorly placed chapter breaks. The break ought to go after 15:7 or even possibly after 15:13. So this paragraph is part of what Paul is teaching in chapter 14.

### **The Pattern of Christ**

**(v.1-4)**

Our obligation to bear with others and to not please ourselves is grounded in the example that Christ has left us and the instruction the Word gives to us.

Paul here shows us how Christ's own selflessness exposes our own tendencies to please ourselves (v.1-3). When we are mostly about plotting and planning our own agendas, then we will almost certainly harm people and destroy the church. Yet Christ has established a pattern of persistent love and enduring sacrifice, even when He was being reviled for it. So we must not only be a people who embrace these truths in practice, but we must endure when it is hard and controversial.

We look to the pattern in Christ by studying the Word of Christ, the Scriptures (v.3-4). Paul can quote this Old Testament text into theirs (and our situations) because it points to Christ. The Scriptures are written about Christ for us in our situations so that, being instructed, we will persist with joy – endure and be encouraged. Paul is showing us a

Biblical hermeneutic. Rather than using the Old Testament in a way that enforces dietary restrictions and ceremonial feast days, the Old Testament is relevant to us as we bring it forward through Christ and in Christ.

### **The Prayer for Unity**

**(v.5-7)**

Paul closes this section by praying for the grace of a God-honoring harmony. This prayer points our harmony towards a unified glorifying of God. The purpose in living together in harmony is to glorify God – with voices in exaltation and evangelism.

It has been my observation over 25 years of ministry that mutual regard in these matters – true loving consideration almost always allows for a practice to exist without constraint of the strong or sin by the weak. I have also noticed that the tendency of the weak is to be legalistic and then to retreat into liberty to enforce their legalism through language like, “What you are doing offends me.” One of the mistakes is to equate being offended by someone else’s practice with stumbling. Paul always uses stumbling to refer to active participation. Certainly, the strong may, in sacrificial love, give up whatever even offends – but the weak may not Biblically require it.

So, Paul says, welcome one another AS – in the way that – Christ has welcomed you. Do so aiming to magnify the supremacy and worth of God.

# Summary

## Welcome One Another (14:1;15:7)

Term		Weak	Strong
<b>Identification</b> <i>Church in Rome</i>		Christians whose consciences were instructed by the Law Primarily Jews	Christians whose consciences were free  Primarily Gentiles. <i>Paul (14:13)</i>
<b>Issues</b>	<b>Food</b>	Abstain	Eat
	<b>Holy Days</b>	Honor/Celebrate	Not Recognize
	<b>Worship Application</b>	Not raise hands	Raise hands
<b>Tendency</b>		Judge & Criticize	Despise/Look down on
<b>Correction</b>		Humbly teachable	Honoring and protecting
<b>Commands</b>		No stumbling block	
		Not destroy	
		Make for peace	
		Live in harmony	
		↔	Bear their failings
<b>Reasons</b>		God has received us (14:3; 15:7)	
		God is our Lord and Master (14:8)	
		God is our Judge – we answer to Him (14:10)	
		The Kingdom is a priority (14:17)	
		Christ did not please Himself (15:3)	
<b>Standard</b>		All by faith	
<b>Aim</b>		Unified glorifying of God	

Welcome One Another		
Term	Weak	Strong
<b>Identification</b>	Christians whose consciences were instructed by the Law Primarily Jews	Christians whose consciences were free Primarily Gentiles <i>Included Paul (14:13)</i>
<b>Issues</b>	<b>Food</b>	Abstain
	<b>Holy Days</b>	Honor/Celebrate
	<b>Raising Hands</b>	Not Raise Hands
<b>Tendency</b>	Judge & Criticize	Despise/Look Down
<b>Correction</b>	Humbly teachable	Honoring & Protecting

Welcome One Another		
Term	Weak	Strong
<b>Commands</b>	No Stumbling Block	
	Not destroy	
	Make for peace	
	Live in Harmony	
	↔	Bear their failings
<b>Reasons</b>	God has received us (14:3;15:7)	
	God is our Lord and Master (14:8)	
	God is our Judge – we answer to Him (14:10)	
	The Kingdom is a priority (14:7)	
	Christ did not please Himself (15:3)	

Welcome One Another		
Term	Weak	Strong
<b>Identification</b>	Strict Consciences	Free Consciences
<b>Issue</b>	Not raise hands	Free to raise hands
<b>Tendency</b>	Judge & Criticize	Despise & Look down
<b>Correction</b>	Be teachable	Not force
<b>Commands</b>	No stumbling block, Not destroy, Make for peace, Live in harmony, Bear their failings	
<b>Reasons</b>	God has received us, God is our Lord and Master God is our Judge – we answer to Him The Kingdom is a priority, Christ did not please Himself	
<b>Standard</b>	All by Faith, not by Doubt	
<b>Aim</b>	Unified glorifying of God	

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## Conclusion

Romans 15:5-7 (Adapted)

*Read together as a prayer.*

May the God of endurance and  
encouragement grant us to live in such  
harmony with one another,  
in accord with Christ Jesus,  
that together we may with one voice  
glorify the God and Father  
of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Therefore welcome one another  
as Christ has welcomed us,  
for the glory of God.



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# The Gospel: God's Will for a Serving People

## Romans 15:7-16:24

**Introduction** We must *LEARN* the Gospel – for it is:

Good News to a Sinful World  
Good News to a Struggling Believer  
Good News from a Sovereign God.

We must *LIVE* the Gospel – for it is:

God's Will for a Sanctified People  
God's Will for a Serving People.

All because of *Centrality* and *Glory* of God in the Gospel.

I love John Stott's introduction to this section. Listen to what he writes. (*Romans*, p.377)

The great exposition (chapters 1-11) and the great exhortation (chapters 12:1-15:6) are over. Paul's readers may well be thinking that his two benedictions are the conclusion of his letter. But he has not finished yet. He intends to return to the question of his relations with the Roman church, which he began to open up earlier (1:8-13). He wants to take them into his confidence about the salient characteristics of his ministry, which will throw light for them on why he has not yet visited them and his plan to do so soon.

But first he wonders whether they may have been offended by the fact, contents or tone of his letter. Has he been presumptuous to address a church he did not found and has never visited? Has he given the impression that he regards their Christianity as defective and immature? Has he been too outspoken? The apostle seems to be experiencing a twinge of apprehension about how his letter will be received. If so, the rest of it will disarm and reassure them. He writes very personally (maintaining an 'I-you' directness throughout), affectionately and candidly. He opens his heart to them about the past, present and future of his ministry, he asks humbly for their prayers and he sends them many greetings. In these ways he give us insight into the outworking of God's providence in his life and work.

## The Explanation of Ministry for the Gentiles 15:7-13

Christ has welcomed Jew and Gentile for the glory of God. God is magnified when His mercy and call by grace extends to Jew and Gentile. That statement in verse 7 than brings us to an explanatory word.

### The Purposes of Christ's Servanthood (v.8-9)

Paul could see that there remained a question in the mind of the Jews. "If the Messiah was to be a King, how could he be a reviled servant?" Rather than this undermining the truthfulness of God in the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, it serves to show how truthful God really is. Christ glorifies God, demonstrating God's truthfulness so that the promises to the patriarchs are confirmed. He fulfills those promises, not in the limited way they expected, but in the greater and more glorious ways Paul has unpacked in Romans, as well as in Galatians and Ephesians. Thus, the Gentiles receive his mercy and respond with praise.

The point here is clear: it is not that redemptive history is about the Jews alone or about separate and never-to-be-confused purposes for Jew and Gentile, but that God's promises had a wideness that was promised and prophesied so that saving mercy is to Jew and Gentile.

### **The Proof from Scripture**

**(v.9-12)**

Where does Paul get the confidence to assert that? From this cluster of texts he cites. For the sake of time, we won't go back and read the surrounding context this morning – in your own study, do that to see the richness of what Paul is doing here. However, do observe the progression. In verse 9, David will praise God *among* the Gentiles. In verse 10, the Gentiles are to rejoice *with* God's people. All the Gentiles are *commanded* to praise God for His faithfulness, verse 11 citing Psalm 117:1. Finally, the Root of Jesse arises *to rule over* and *be hoped in* by the Gentiles, citing Isaiah 11:10.

I cannot pass by that the Messiah who will come (from Isaiah's perspective) is the root of Jesse. Isn't it true that roots support the trunk and branches – that roots preceded the plant? So how can Christ be the root of Jesse's son? Is it merely because He is eternal and precedes David in existence? I think not. In other words, Jesus is not the King because David was the King – no, David is a King on a throne because Jesus will be the King on that throne. So here the glory of what is *yet in the future* is the source of minor and reflected glories all the way to back David.

### **The Prayer for Joyful Hope**

**(v.13)**

Since we have a faithful and truthful God, then this prayer focuses on joy and peace in *believing* that yields by the Spirit's power, an abounding hope. Paul prays that this is so. Once gain, we are brought face to face with the startlingly spiritual aspect of Paul's praying.

When our Hopes are on someone or something else, we are doomed to unhappiness and turmoil and ever-increasing discouragement and despair. Having all of the Bible to believe in an obeying way, what joy and peace comes when we anchor our hope in the God of hope. We will have therefore an abounding hope by the power of God's Spirit moving through the Word believed.

May this be so for you as well.

### **The Example of Ministry in the Gospel**

**15:14-33**

If the Gentiles are to truly become the people of God, what kind of ministry will bring that about? Paul models three essential elements of a ministry in the gospel aimed to bring the Gentiles as well as the Jews to praise God all over the world.

### **Shaped by Purpose**

**(v.14-21)**

Paul models a ministry that aims to *FINISH* (v.14-19). His purposes in life and ministry give him a sense of having fulfilled what God had for him. So, while he is confident in their ability to minister to one another (v.14), he is concerned to expound on the gospel (v.15) so that his ministry will be acceptable to God (v.16) and accomplished by God's power (v.17-18).

Paul's philosophy of ministry here is so evident. It is a ministry by enabling grace (v.15b). It is a ministry that serves God (v.16a). It is a ministry that has a God-defined aim and target – *to the Gentiles* (v.16b). It is a ministry in the gospel that has a priestly metaphor – that is, he wants the offering of the Gentiles to meet the standard so that it will be accepted and approved by God (v.16b). It is a ministry to be proud of, but only in Christ – therefore, it requires humility. It is a ministry in which he works because God is working through him (v.18), even the working of miracles as an apostle (v.19). While much of this is unique to Paul's apostolic ministry, many of these have application to evangelists and missionaries and to us as well.

Paul models a ministry that aims for *FOUNDATIONS* (v.20-21). He is an apostle who is laying foundations in terms of the *what* of his ministry, the gospel and the Scriptures and in terms of the *where* of his ministry. He aims to be pioneering in ministry – to go where others have not yet gone and bring the gospel to those who have not heard. He then takes his purpose as an apostle and his aim in ministry and can speak in terms of *ambition*. My purpose becomes what I pursue.

I want to highlight the importance of *PURPOSE* for life and ministry. Since coming to understand and define God's purpose for my life, both in the universals that all of us share and in the particulars of my life, there has been a joy and satisfaction that is hard to describe. I would encourage each of you to pray over and reflect on God's providence in your life and begin to articulate God's purpose for you.

### **Implemented with Planning**

**(v.22-29)**

The purposes of our ministry work are implemented practically through planning. Paul lays out some amazing plans for his ministry. He plans a trip to Rome (v.23-24), to Jerusalem (v.25-27) and then to Spain (v.28-29).

Paul's planning has its *HOPES* (v.22-24). Paul has great hopes to come to Rome that have been hindered. So there is very real since in which we plan along the track of our purposes with real hopes and longings. Planning is as much about what we want and desire as it is about what we think and describe.

Paul's planning prioritizes in its *OUGHTS* (v.25-27). He has a responsibility to carry the offering for the church at Jerusalem to them. He sees the fulfilling of the Gentile church's obligations in this matter as a governing priority, even over his hopes. This expression of unity and solidarity and care for the poor saints in Jerusalem is a way that his mission to the Gentiles is fulfilled as they sacrificially fulfill their spiritual and material debt to Jews. So our planning of ministry towards purposes must identify responsibilities and obligations, prioritizing on them.

Paul's planning moves in its *BLESSINGS* (v.28-29). The word for blessing here is literally "good word". The blessing here is in the sense of the trip will be pleasing to God so that He will prosper and reward it. God's approving and enabling blessing will be on ministry as we move forward with an emphasis on our priorities, and our hopes and desires are realistic and flexible.

**Relies on Prayer****(v.30-33)**

Our lives and ministries must be shaped by clear, Biblically informed purpose statements, careful and flexible planning that relies on partnerships in prayer.

They *STRIVE* together in a partnership (v.30). Paul appeals for their partnership in the struggle of ministry through prayer. They may not be together now, but they can still be involved in the work now.

They pray for his *SAFETY AND SERVICE* (v.31). The partnership in prayer then identifies the real needs to be prayed over. He wants them to pray for protection from unbelievers, for being accepted in his ministry and then, if God wills, that he will be able to come to them.

Their prayer brings a mutual *SERVING* (v.32-33). Finally, relying on prayer means that we value serving others to the degree that being with people in ministry energizes and refreshes us.

**The Exhortations to Ministry of Grace****16:1-24**

Paul seems to be having trouble closing this book. So much so that commentators fall all over themselves trying to explain it. Some over focus on the human element and then deny that what is here ought to be here. Yet, we do this all the time with our own letters. You write it, close it with your signature and then you add a PS – a postscript. Just because these may be postscripts – after all it is a human author giving the book by dictation – they are supposed to be here because there is the Divine Author, the Holy Spirit who carries Paul along even in the post scripts.

**Welcome in a Worthy Way****(v.1-16)**

This large section shows Paul's love for people. In fact, it is staggering that he knows all these people when he has never been to the church there. It is very important for us to ponder the fact that most of the New Testament letters are full of people – to people, for people and about people. To frame this in a bit – I think of this as *HELP* and *HELLO*.

**Help for Others****(v.1-2)**

Paul begins this people section by commending the lady who would be carrying the letter to them. They were to receive her and to sustain her by meeting her needs. Paul indicates that she is a Christian sister (v.1a), the church's servant (v.1b), sent on a mission (v.2a), sustained and supplied others needs (v.2b). In agreement with many commentators, I am of the strong opinion that Phoebe was a deacon. I get that from the fact that she is not just a servant, but also a Servant of the church at Cenchreae.

**Hello to Others****(v.3-16)**

Paul's expects us to be open to one another. Notice the themes that intertwine these greetings of saved and serving. This morning, I cannot go through each one of these and identify who they are. We do find Priscilla and Aquila once again in the thick of risky ministry for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ. Epaphroditus was the first one saved in Asia. There are several names here that come from families who would have been famous in that day. And we meet some who were saved before

Paul, work hard in the church, were imprisoned, were well known to the Apostles (or possibly were outstanding missionaries), one who is identified as being elect or chosen.

So all of these individuals are to greet one another. And so are the churches. So Paul points us to a network of personal and corporate relationships spread all over the known world. This ought to encourage us to value relationships, to cultivate hospitality, to love people and seek to know many. While Paul encourages a holy kiss of greeting, we may and probably ought to express our love and acceptance to others through the cultural forms of our day.

I want you to see a couple of important things through this section. First, there is an enormous diversity of people – slaves, freedmen, rich, poor, politicians and bureaucrats. There are a large number of women who are commended as faithful and hard working. Yet, they are all one for they are the saved and serving.

### **Warning against Divisive People (v.17-20)**

Many find this transition from acceptance to admonition to abrupt. But the unity and diversity of the church has to be guarded by careful watchfulness for those who divide the church. While we are open to receive people whose convictions of practice are different and welcome saved and serving people, we must hold true to doctrine.

The warning opens with a *COMMAND* (v.17). The appeal is to be watchful for people who are harmful in the church. We need to be on the alert for those who do two things: cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to what we have learned from the apostles in the Scriptures. There is an objective standard that our unity is anchored to and defined by. While loving people, we must be loyal to truth. What is commanded is separation – we must avoid them. Now I think this is both internally and externally. Our faith is not strengthened by error. So there is little positive value in listening, watching or reading that which is contrary to the sound doctrine of the Bible and the church. Avoid it.

Paul heightens his warning by indicating some *CHARACTERISTICS* (v.18) of this kind of people. They tend to be people who not only believe wrong (v.17), but who are mastered and driven by their desires, by what they want and crave. So the problem with divisive people is a heart issue – it is in what they believe and in what they want. This is in line with most of the New Testament. Paul connects wrong doctrine with corrupt desires. The great danger here is in their ability to deceive. They often are kind, winsome people who are eloquent, articulate and persuasive. And we are very vulnerable, particularly when we are naïve in doctrine and deception.

In this context, Paul expresses a *CONCERN* (v.19) for them. They have a reputation for obedience. Paul rejoices in that reputation. But, he wants them, as J.B. Phillips puts it, “to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil.” So he is calling for alertness in the midst of a lack of sophistication about evil.

Finally, Paul assures them with strong affirmations of his *CONFIDENCE* (v.20) in God’s ultimate victory. There is a future victory in the midst of a present provision. Until Satan is crushed under their feet, there is enabling grace from our Lord Jesus Christ now. Now look at something – the God of peace crushes Satan. So peace is not the absence of conflict – it is the presence of God and His power to bring about the eschatological victory.

Stott detects three, and I will add one, valuable tests to apply to different systems of doctrine and ethics, and to those who teach, preach and write them. Is it (a) Biblical, (b) Christological, (c) moral and (d) eschatological? Does it agree with Scriptures? Does it pursue and praise Christ? Does it lead to goodness and holiness? Does it rely on grace now in view of a future victory?

## **Workers in Present Ministry**

**(v.21-22)**

That brings us then to the final postscript where he sends messages from his co-workers in ministry. His co-laborers, his secretary and his host all send their greetings to the church at Rome. So he is surrounded by Jewish converts committed to ministry. He has someone who serves him in his poor eyesight by writing down the letter as he dictates. And he has a host whose open heart and home and hospitality free Paul for more effective ministry.

The gospel then is God's will for a serving people.

## **Conclusion**

Let us see our mission as one of calling all people to glorify God in Christ by believing and bowing to Him.

Let us be a people who follow Paul's model of Ministry – to be shaped by purpose implemented by planning, all the while relying on prayer.

Let us be a people who minister in grace – as we welcome the saved and the serving. May we cultivate an deep openness to people.

Let us be a people who love God through the doctrine we believe. May we be alert and watchful to those who would divide and set obstacles contrary to what we believe and avoid them.

Let us look and long and lean toward the soon coming Day when the enemy of our souls will be CRUSHED!

May this grace of God for your loving and living magnify Christ, here, in our community and all over the world.

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# The Gospel: Doxology at Advent

## Romans 16:25-27

**Introduction** I know that in pulpits all over the world, preaching will take up the story of Christ's birth today and the emphasis will be on his incarnation. And that is a needful emphasis. But there is also a danger – a danger that we will focus on the humanity of Christ as a babe in the manger with all sorts of tender, but speculative sentiments that draw out worship for Jesus' humanity. Yes, he was truly man, truly human. He took on human clay and veiled His glory. But we do not worship the humanity of Christ – we worship Christ in His deity. The worship that is fueled during this season ought to be wonder at the amazing condescension of the Lord Jesus – that He, infinite, eternal, unchanging Deity should become one of us, except without our sin.

The New Testament tends to focus on Christ in this different way. That is, it does not ignore the reality of a human birth as a baby, while it emphasizes over and over again the holiness of His life and the meaning of His death and resurrection. The birth is seen as a means for Jesus, the Son of God, to become human. Even the taking on of humanity *is seen in redemptive and ruling categories*.

There is no better time than this season of the year to ponder and savor the significance of the gospel in the doxology that closes Romans.

**Text - ESV**

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

### For His Work

**(v.25)**

The doxology – the worship form – worships God *FOR HIS* work. It opens like two others in the New Testament.

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, ESV)*

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)*

So God is honored in this praise for His power and wisdom. This is the essence of the book of Romans. The gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God. So what we know to be true of God drives and shapes our worship.

## In His Person

God is one *WHO IS ABLE* to strengthen us. He is this kind of God. He is invested with *du-namis*, with power. He is not a God who is dependent upon the choices and whims of man. Through His ordained means, He moves with sovereign authority and ability to accomplish what His wisdom has designed and His will has determined.

## In its Power

The work of God here is a *STRENGTHENING FOR STABILITY*. While the gospel is the power of God for salvation in Romans 1:5-7, here it is the power of God for stability. The word means “to put or place something firmly in its location.” What is needed is strength to withstand the temptations to sin and to cling to Christ and not be moved from the confession of our faith nor its assurance. So, this is not a precept to be strong, but a promise of strength. Our powerful God promises to establish us in our faith.

## In its Preaching

That strength for stability comes *ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL*, which is the preaching of Christ. So God’s power given as strength does not come directly like rain from heaven, but like electricity through a wire. There is a conduit, a means through which that strength comes. Now, I detect two ideas here.

- The gospel establishes *THE EXPECTATION AND STANDARD* for that strength. Understand this – Paul is not concerned about physical strength, but rather about spiritual stamina. So we should expect a cross, resurrection and glory rhythm to God’s work in us. How do we know that?
- The gospel is primarily *THE PROCLAMATION OF JESUS CHRIST*. It is about how the Messiah Jesus, through His death, resurrection and glorious rule brings to fulfillment what the Old Testament promised and prophesied. The focus is on Jesus. Further, the focus is on Jesus *proclaimed*.

The focus on Jesus here is not on some subjective relationship from which we draw strength. Rather, as we hear truth about Him and therefore see Him by the eyes of faith, the very power of God flows into our inner being to sustain us. We must be careful to be proclaiming the gospel that Paul preached. There are other “gospels” out there that are no true gospel. I love Paul’s ownership of it here – it is “my gospel.” While we cannot own it in the same apostolic way, we can certainly embrace it in a very personal way.

So the gospel, the preaching, the *kerygma*, of Christ is not just the power of God for salvation by faith, but also the power of God to stand firm. This is why you will hear the gospel here all the time – we will in all our preaching bring Christ to you so that you will be brought to Christ. This is why I am deeply concerned that the whole Bible is preached in such a way that it shows the contours of the greatness of Christ and how that topography maps out over your life.

## For His Wisdom

This is why then we worship God *FOR HIS WISDOM*. Thomas Schreiner summarizes this section of the doxology this way, “The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by Paul fulfills what the OT Scriptures predicted.” (*Romans*, t. Schreiner, p.813) The challenge for me this morn-

ing is not to miss the importance of the details of God's wisdom while not bogging us down in theological word play so that we are distracted from worship. So it is my aim to show you the exquisite wisdom of God for a moment and then throw it like gasoline on the fire of your worship.

### **Its Redemptive Development**

**(v.25b-26a)**

The preaching of Jesus Christ is the revealing of a mystery. What was once hidden is being disclosed *now*. The operative word here is now. The fullness of all that God is for us in Jesus the Messiah was not uncovered in the past. It was a mystery. It was true, but the redemptive clock had not reached the high noon of the cross and resurrection. So there is a redemptive historical development – a progression in the revelation of who the Messiah is and the scope of His worth, words and work. So there were lambs in the Old pointing to the Lamb. There were tabernacles and Temples pointing to Jesus Christ our Temple. There were priests who ministered imperfectly the perfection of our great High Priest. There was a people of God who were largely of one ethnic background, one culture with a strictly ordered life pointing to Jesus, in whom the people of God are from all people groups with a rich life of grace and freedom on holiness. The point is that we must now live in the riches all that we know of Christ now.

And so 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 says,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (ESV)

The exquisite wisdom of God is unveiled in progressive glory as the river of time flows from the glory of the future into the words and works of the past.

### **Its Biblical Hermeneutic**

**(v.26)**

Our worship of God in His wisdom is also shaped by *ITS BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC*. O, my goodness – on Christmas Sunday you are going to talk about hermeneutics! Absolutely. The glory of Jesus' incarnation is most fully seen and savored when we come to the Bible the way the Bible explains itself. Here is a fundamental principle – the Old Testament can only be correctly interpreted and fully appreciated by the people of God on the resurrection side of the cross.

Notice what this sentence (actually, clause) is saying: the mystery is now revealed in preaching Christ because it was hidden, kept secret in the past and is now disclosed being made known through the prophetic writings. So, the person and work of Jesus Christ were in the Old Testament, hidden particularly in the prophetic books, but now that He has come and inaugurated the fulfillment, we read the Old Testament and see what no Old Testament person could have ever seen. In other words, we read the Old Testament as Christians, not as Israelites. We still need to be sure that we get the words and sentences and paragraphs right – but what they are pointing to is Jesus in all that He is and

all that He brings about. This principle is so important as we begin expounding our way through the book of Ezekiel in February.

So, once again the principle articulated by Schreiner, “The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by Paul fulfills what the OT Scriptures predicted.” The translator of Calvin’s Commentaries says, “Their value to the Jew was very different from that to the Christian. To the former they were the highest revelation attainable, while for us they do not reveal a single attribute or purpose of Deity which is not more fully made known through the Gospel dispensation. The Hebrew visions stand to us in the relation of porch to temple, and of dawn to day.... They were specially appropriate to the people to whom they were bestowed, and of a structure and material in accordance with the dispensation to which they ministered. They were prefigurative and preformative throughout. They were preparatory and thus far excellent, but not “chiefest of all” because not permanent. Like the scaffolding, the growing blade, the finished portrait, they fail in comparison with the stately building, the ripened corn, the living person.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus Paul writes the following in Colossians 1:25-28.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (ESV)

The mystery that was kept secret has now been made know to all the people groups through the prophetic writings. So the gospel has now moved outward to all the people groups. Now that we know that is true, you can see it all over the Old Testament. Paul clearly in much of his writing interprets the Old Testament with a “to the Jew and Gentile in Christ as the church” hermeneutic. Why? Because this is the will (or command) of God. The point here is not that we are commanded to preach – we are, but that is not Paul’s point here. Paul’s point here is that this Christ-centered preaching and hermeneutic *was designed and determined by God*. This is not a personal innovation on Paul’s part. That it was kept secret and now is disclosed is not a weakness of the Scripture, but rather the wonder of God’s wisdom.

## **Its Glorious Aim**

**(v.26c)**

Why is this? Because God has designed by His wisdom that His work would bring about the obedience of faith. When Christ is proclaimed, from Old Testament through New Covenant contours, then the gospel accomplishes what it was purposed to do – produce obeying faith in all of God’s people from all over the world during all this age. Paul had aimed his own life and ministry along this trajectory (Romans 1:5-6) because God had purposed this very aim for the gospel.

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<sup>5</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Ezekiel*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

Brothers and sisters, we ought to glorify God for His great wisdom. He has, with superb skill unfolded with ever-increasing clarity the greatness of His love for Christ and for us in Christ. At the center of this is Jesus, coming in the incarnation – born as a baby, living as a man, dying as lamb, rising as the Lord and ruling as the King. And all like a hidden treasure buried in the Old Testament and unearthed and placed on public display in Scriptures.

Thomas Schreiner captures this for us so well as he writes, “As Paul meditates on God’s ability to establish believers so that they persevere in the faith to the end, he gives God the glory because he deserves the credit for the perseverance of believers. Such perseverance has its roots in the power of the gospel, which centers on the person of Jesus Christ, Paul praises God because at this juncture of history he has unveiled them mystery of the gospel, which was hidden from previous generations but has now been eschatologically manifested and revealed through Jesus Christ. It is now God’s will or ‘command’ that this gospel be disseminated among all peoples, so that they will experience the obedience that flows from faith.” (*Romans*, Schreiner, p. 815).

## **For His Worth**

At the end of the day, God’s work and wisdom flow out of *THE IMMEASURABLE WORTH* of His glory.

### **In His Supremacy**

He is supremely “God only wise.” All the idols of human invention and imagination are dirty used carbons in contrast to the stunning wisdom of the one God. Thus God is supreme – both in the grandness of His planning and in the greatness of His power. He dwells alone in solitary wisdom stretching out from eternity to eternity through time the awful beauty of the intricate weaving of His works, showing forth His Son in breathtaking display.

### **Through His Son**

God determined to magnify Himself, to bring glory to Himself *through Jesus Christ*. The supreme glory of God is His Son for “He is the radiance of the glory of God” (Hebrews 1:3, ESV). Though the glory of God may be seen in lesser lenses – creation, His people, His eternal benefits – all of these are telescopes through which the greater glory of God through Jesus Christ is to be seen now from a distance and face to face throughout eternity.

So this is why we can celebrate the coming of Christ and why we must never stop there. In His birth he took on a human body, forever. In His resurrection, that body was glorified, ascended and seated in eternal ruling session in heaven from whence He will come again some day. And the Ancient of Days will stand and raise His mighty arm and time will be no more and before His glorious Son every knee will bow. Amen!

One expositor concluded, “The major themes of [Romans] are encapsulated in the doxology: the power of God to save and to establish; the gospel and the mystery, once hidden and now revealed, which are Christ crucified and risen; the Christ-centered witness of Old Testament Scripture; the commission of God to make the good news universally known; the summons to all the nations to respond with the obedience of faith and the saving wisdom of God, to whom all glory is due forever.” (*Romans*, Stott, p.406). **Conclusion**

Thy Father clasps Thee evermore  
 In unspeakable embraces,  
 While angels tremble as they praise,  
 And shroud their dazzled faces.  
 And Oh! In what abyss of love,  
 So fiery yet so tender,  
 The Holy Ghost encircles Thee  
 With His uncreated splendor!  
 O Word! O dear and gentle Word!  
 Thy creatures kneel before Thee,  
 And in ecstasies of timid love  
 Delightedly adore Thee.  
 Hail choicest mystery of God!  
 Hail wondrous Generation!  
 The Father’s self-sufficient rest!  
 The Spirit’s jubilation!  
 Dear Person! Dear beyond all words,  
 Glorious beyond all telling!  
 O with what songs of silent love  
 Our ravished hearts are swelling!  
 O marvelous! O worshipful!  
 No song or sound is heard,  
 But everywhere and every hour,  
 In love, in wisdom, and in power,  
 The Father speaks His dear Eternal Word.

Fredrick William Faber, 1814-1863

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# The Gospel: Shaping Us for the New Year

## Romans 1:16-17

**Introduction** As we close this year, I thought I would take us through the book Romans and see how what we have learned this fall should shape us for the coming year. If the gospel is what Romans says it is, then how ought we to incorporate that into our lives – into how we think and what we want in a life pleasing to God?

### **Introduction: The *Centrality* of God in the Gospel 1:1-17**

The gospel is about God – about who He is and what He has done in and through His Son to save His people and thus magnify Himself and show Himself to be worthy of ultimate admiration. The centrality of God in the gospel involves two key elements

#### **The Person of Christ**

The gospel is about Christ Jesus, the Lord. It is about the Messiah, the Lord Jesus who came for His people, not just as physical descendents of Abraham, but all who are spiritual descendents. The gospel is about the doing and dying of our Savior as promised, predicted, prophesied, performed and proclaimed.

#### **The Power of God**

The gospel is the power of God to bring about the salvation of His people. The gospel is powerful because it tells us how God has effected our salvation and is powerful because it effects that salvation in our lives.

What are the practical implications for Paul and for us?

- We must not be ashamed of the gospel. We must have confidence in the gospel. We must be able to trust the gospel to do what God says it will do – to highlight Christ and to save sinners.
- We must preach the gospel. We must be eager to proclaim the gospel, to weave it into our life's story, into counsel of the lost and the saved. We must be prepared and poised to share the gospel.

## **Doctrine: We Must Learn the Gospel**

If we are going to trust and teach the gospel, we must know it. In this day when we are largely ignorant of the gospel, it is time to learn the gospel.

### **The Gospel: Good News to a Sinful World 1:18-5:21**

The gospel is good news to a sinful world. It begins to describing the problem of sinfulness and declaring the provision for sinfulness.

#### **The Universality of Condemnation 1:18-3:20**

Every person is a sinner – by union with Adam and by personal acts with the resulting condemnation by God. The downward spiral of sin in history and in cultures and in individual lives is graphically portrayed. Therefore, both Jew and Gentile are on equal footing as condemned sinners, guilty, deserving of death and in need of God's grace. He reaches that awful conclusion, none are righteous, every mouth is to be closed and the whole world is accountable to God.

#### **The Way of Justification 3:21-4:25**

Since we cannot be accepted by God on our own work or worth, then God has moved in Christ to accept us based on His work and worth – His merits. God is just and the justifier of those whom He saves for He punishes their sin in Christ and puts Christ's righteousness to their account, accepting them by faith through grace. Once again, the Jew and Gentile are on the same footing before God – both are accepted by faith in the Messiah's work and worth., His doing and dying.

#### **The Blessedness of Justification 5:1-21**

The good news then is that because of this righteousness we have access to God, reconciliation to God, peace with God, life from God, union with Christ, and grace reigning in this life until glory reigns in the life to come.

What does this mean for us?

- We must affirm that all are sinners. The moralists, the pagans, the Muslims, the philosophers, our sweet neighbors, our loving family members – they are all condemned unless they have faith in Christ.
- We must stop pretending that there is a hope outside of Christ – either for ourselves or for others. We must trust utterly in the finished work and tested righteousness of Christ.
- We must revel and savor the sweetness of all that Christ's righteousness brings to us. It must fill our minds and shape our desires and fuel our worship and purify our walk.

### **The Gospel: Good News to a Struggling Believer 6:1-8:33**

The gospel is good news to the struggling believer. It tells how not to be enslaved to the old person we were and the old way that has since been fulfilled.

**Freed from Sins' Enslaving Power****6:1-23**

Since we have died to the old man we were, we ought to live by the power of the new man we have become in Christ. We must stop yielding ourselves to sin and we must stop presenting ourselves to the occasions of sin. We are not slaves to sin but servants of righteousness.

**Released from the Law's Arousing Principle****7:1-25**

Since we have died to the old sphere of the flesh, we are freed from being under Law. We are now in the sphere of the Spirit and are under grace. The Law stirs up our old self while grace enables the new self. But there will be a struggle with increasing holiness as we trust and rely on the saving and sanctifying work of Christ.

**Indwelt by the Spirit's Enabling Presence****8:1-39**

Since we are now sons of God by birth and have been adopted and recognized as sons, we have the Spirit who resides in us and in whose sphere of life and authority we live and walk. So we are more than conquerors, by the Spirit in the midst of groaning while headed for glory.

So how is this to shape us for the coming year?

- We must not live as though the old man we were is the way we are now. We must understand what God has done and what we are to do. We have a responsibility to stop presenting our bodies to do sin and stop presenting ourselves to the opportunities (temptations) to sin.
- We must not become functional legalists. Law systems of living will simply enflame the old self. We must not look to rules to empower holiness, but to grace by the Spirit to enable a life pleasing to God.
- We must expect that, while we are sons by the Spirit, we will experience groaning – hardships, difficulty, struggle – until glory comes. We are pilgrims on the way – we are headed home – we are not there yet.

## **The Gospel: Good News from a Sovereign God 9:1-11:36**

The gospel is good news from our sovereign God. What God's wisdom has designed and His will has decided, His work has done and His Word has declared.

### **The Purposes of God in Election**

**9:1-33**

The good news is that salvation is sure. It is sure to those whom God has chosen. Salvation does not depend in human choice or exertion, but on a merciful God. The objections that commonly arise are Scripturally and theologically answered. God will show the utter greatness of His glory as He endures with patience those prepared for wrath and moves with power to save those chosen by His love.

### **The Principles of Faith for Salvation**

**10:1-21**

The salvation that God has purposed comes to His elect through faith. They believe in Christ and bow to Him. Thus God has chosen both Jews and Gentiles to be saved – but they both are saved by faith and repentance. Thus, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord, may be saved.

### **The Prospects of Mercy for Israel**

**11:1-32**

But what happens then to all the promises for Israel? The promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled in Christ. Being a physical descendent of Abraham does not give you a claim to the promises. Only those who were spiritual descendents, both among Jew and Gentile, were heirs of the promises. Among unbelieving Israel, there was always a remnant who believed. God's promises will be fulfilled when all the elect Jews are gathered in down through this age until the full number of all the elect are saved. Thus the wisdom of God and the worth of God are held up for all to admire and acclaim.

What does this mean for us?

- We must be a people who are not afraid to affirm with joy and clarity the Biblical, God honoring, humbling doctrine of election. It is our aim as a church to savor the supremacy of God – and this truth is a sweet morsel.
- We must clearly proclaim the gospel and call for Biblically defined responses. We must proclaim and invite people to believe the gospel and bow to Christ. It is not to ask Jesus in their hearts or any number of other unbiblical formulations. For the sake of their souls, call on them to believe, bow and call.
- Our expectations for Israel must be defined by a New Covenant and Christ centered fulfillment. It is in Christ that all they (and we) are promised will receive as He has inaugurated the Kingdom and will bring it to fulfillment and consummation in the future.

## **Duty: We Must Live the Gospel**

Since all this is true of the gospel, we must live by the gospel. We must live what we have learned.

## **The Gospel: God's Will for a Sanctified People 12:1-15:13**

The gospel is first God's will for a sanctified people. It is about how we as God's people are to live in this world. We have two major challenges to face – purity in the midst of evil and unity in the midst of diversity.

### **Our Relationships as the Covenant Community 12:1-21**

The gospel establishes the expectations and aims for Christians together in church community. Our relationships in our church – in the community of believers – requires self-sacrifice, radical transformation, grace-enabled use of gifts and powerfully authentic love.

### **Our Responsibilities in the Already and Not Yet 13:1-14**

We are heaven's citizens. This truth and reality affects how we respond to sinners around us and the government over us. As aliens and strangers, our lifestyles are to be shaped by a law fulfilling love, a powerful urgency and a Christ-centered purity. What a humble, holy, wise, loving, gentle, generous, submissive and heavenward longing band are these pilgrims, these foreigners, these citizens of God's Kingdom.

### **Our Responses in the Matters of Conscience 14:1-15:13**

Since we are a people of many diverse backgrounds and widely different cultures, we must know how to live together in peace when our opinions in matters of conscience differ. We are to welcome one another, but not to harmful disputes. We are to not judge and criticize others who are freer in their consciences and we are not to despise and look down on those whose consciences are not as free. We will do all we can to make for peace, not cause others to stumble because we recognize that God has received all of us, He is our judge, master and Lord and the realities of the Kingdom outweigh all personal preferences. Modeling our lives after Christ's self-sacrificial way, we will aim to glorify God in authentic unity, choosing the way of wisdom by faith.

Quite simply, we who seek to please God in all things will often find ourselves not only different from the world, but different from many claiming the Name of Christ. Setting our faces homeward, we will live here and now for the sake of our King and His people.

**The Gospel: God's Will for a Serving People 15:14-16:24**

The gospel also defines God's will for a serving people. We are here to serve our King in the Kingdom – to minister in word and deed.

**The Example of a Ministry of the Gospel 15:14-33**

We have a model of a ministry shaped by purpose, implemented with flexible planning that relies on prayer. It is a ministry that understands priorities and focuses on relationships with God's people. Gospel ministry is characterized by sacrifice and serving, never self-interest and self-ambition.

**The Exhortation to a Ministry of Grace 16:1-24**

In a ministry of grace, we will welcome those who serve and savor. We will also warn against those who divide and destroy. Grace then enables us to stand with God's growing people and stand against dangerous and divisive people.

**Conclusion: The *Glory* of God in the Gospel 16:25-27**

In conclusion, I want to read to you the two great doxologies in Romans.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?  
Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36, ESV).

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, ESV).*