

ROMANS

Bible Study

Unedited

Romans 1

Rom 1:1-6 “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ”

Paul tells us here that he is a servant or slave of Christ. If we put ourselves back in these times, a servant was a common position, but not one to be desired. Paul begins here by telling us that he is a willing servant and is glad to do whatever the Lord calls him to do. In the Old Testament, this meant that you would have your ear pierced with an awl as we read in Exodus: “But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life” (Ex 21:5-6). Interestingly, the Messiah is also called a servant in Isaiah 42:1 because Christ did only what the Father wanted Him to do. We read in John, “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does’” (John 5:19-20). Clearly, Christ showed us how to be a servant. Just as Christ was a servant to the Father we, too, are servants of Christ.

What has Paul been asked to do by his Master? To be an apostle for Christ. The word apostle means simply to be “sent forth” or “appointed.” In other words, Paul is being sent out to preach the Gospel by Jesus Christ. More than that, Paul was “set apart” for this very reason. God picked Paul out on that Damascus road (Acts 7) and chose him to be his servant before Paul ever chose God. Not only that, but though Paul considers himself a servant, God now calls him a friend. This is really what Jesus foretold while speaking to his disciples, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last” (John 15:15-16). It was important for Paul to let us know this because he is clearly telling us that it was not his own doing or his own appointment, but the call of Christ that brought him to this position. Likewise, Christ is calling you today. He desires that none should perish and, this time, you are on that road to Damascus. Will you answer the call? God is not an evil taskmaster who controls us with a rod and whip. Instead, through Christ Jesus (and only through Him) we are His friend and enter a loving relationship with our Master. Instead of our ears being pierced, Christ had his body pierced for us. Will you accept those wounds on your behalf? Quoting Isaiah 53:5 Peter writes, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

It might be good to discuss exactly what it means to be chosen as well. In Genesis we read of Abram being called or chosen, “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, *and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*’” (Gen 12:1-3). God called and Abram obeyed (as we will discuss further in verse seven). Abraham was called to a promise. The promise is that everyone on earth will be blessed through him (Jews) so the function of the Jew being chosen is to bring blessings to other nations. To bring God’s ways and His Gospel to the nations. In the musical “Fiddler on the roof” there is a line where one of the Jewish men say, “Lord, couldn’t you have chosen somebody else?” One is tempted to say that being chosen isn’t a good thing, however, one must realize, your being chosen isn’t for your sake but for Christ’s sake and to bring glory to other nations. Thus, through you (chosen ones) the Gospel must go forth to others. It isn’t about you!

Think about it. Isn’t it strange that in Genesis 15 God gives the promise of the land of Israel to Abraham and the Jews. Ironically, most Jews have never lived there, yet they have a longing to be there. Even at Passover they say, “Next year in Jerusalem.” There is an innate drive to connect with the land of Israel and God’s covenant. The problem is, this promise can not be fulfilled until they come to know Yeshua as Messiah.

We also see this plan of God’s covenant and Israel blessing other nations traced throughout the Old Testament. Abraham blessed Abimelech, “To Sarah he said, ‘I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.’ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again” (Gen 20:16-17). We see Jacob blessed Pharaoh even though logic seems that Pharaoh would be the one to be blessing this peasant Jacob, “Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence” (Gen 47:10). God’s call to the Jew is the same for us today because we have not replaced Israel, but rather joined them in this same covenant of which we are to bless the nations around us. As the Jews have found out, it isn’t easy.

What is this Gospel that we have been called to? It isn’t a new thing, but rather an old promise that goes back to the very beginning of time. Even Adam and Eve were told that the offspring of Eve would crush the offspring of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Indeed, God told us about this Gospel through His Old Testament prophets, from Adam to Malachi. All of them were told about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was even called God’s “son” and a descendant of David. The genealogy shows Christ did indeed come from the line of David and thus being one proof that Jesus was the foretold Messiah. In fact, 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:5; and 2 Chron 6:16 all foretold that David would never cease to have a descendant on his throne. This “descendant” was always viewed as the Messiah which is why so much space is given to prove this descent (Luke 1:27; Matt 9:27; 15:22; 12:23; 21:9,15; 22:42,45; John 7:42; 2 Tim 2:8).

The second proof of this “sonship” would be given by the resurrection of His body from the dead. Jesus even foretold this as the “sign of the prophet Jonah” (Mat 12:39-40). Clearly this act could not be just a coincidence. In making a distinction between Christ’s flesh and his sonship we see that Jesus was more than just a man, but God as well. Christ is called THE Son of God 42 times in the New Testament. This title made Him equal with God as the Jews understood, “For this reason the Jews tried all the

harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18, Also John 10:29-36). This is why the angels worship Jesus. Christ being full God also explains why He is the Creator of all things, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1-4). This is why Jesus could also say, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Clearly, Jesus is God, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him” (Col 1:19-20). Even though Christ was full God, he also became full man. Paul later wrote, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, *being in very nature God*, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but *made Himself nothing*, taking the very *nature of a servant*, being made in *human likeness*. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8). This is why Christ is also called the Son of Man throughout the Scriptures. Clearly Christ’s identity as the Son of God is not a phrase to simply skip over. It identified Jesus as the Messiah and God Himself. This is why we read of Paul in the book of Acts, “At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20, see also Rom 1:4; Mark 14:61; Luke 1:35; 22:70; John 1:34).

Also, no small miracle is what Christ came to do as the Son of God. Understanding the importance of this term and the power behind it is very humbling because we read in Galatians about those who follow and believe in Jesus as their Savior, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). Paul later even calls us co-heirs with Christ, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom 8:17). This does not mean that we become God, however, it does mean that through faith in Christ, He is pleased to place His divine nature upon us. “Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Praise be to God for this glorious gift!

This Gospel message was given by the prophets through the “Holy Scriptures.” Why are they called holy? Because they are the very Words of God that distinguish them from other writings. Jesus Himself gives credibility to the organized books of the Old Testament in Matthew where He says, “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matt 23:35-36). Abel was killed in the book of Genesis and Zechariah was killed in 2 Chronicles. Therefore, Jesus is giving credibility from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. For some this may seem like He is leaving out a few books until you realize that the Hebrew Bible begins in Genesis and ends in 2 Chronicles with all the other books in between. Thus, Christ is saying that He accepts from A to Z of the Old Testament and acknowledges them as Holy.

Verse five tells us that it was through Christ that “we” have received “grace” and an “apostleship.” This emphasizes the fact that we, too, are included in this calling to be an apostle. How can it be? Only through God’s grace. So what is grace? It is different from mercy. Mercy is God withholding punishment that we deserve. Grace is God pouring out blessings that we don’t deserve. Therefore, even though the word, “servant”

seems to be a negative term, here we see that being a servant of Christ or an apostle of Christ is a blessing. Indeed, this is the very purpose for which you have been created and when you fulfill your calling how can you not be overjoyed? Even more importantly, however, this isn't for your sake that you have been called into this great commission. It is for Christ's sake and His glory that we, His friends, work as willing servants for our Master.

Who are we called to go to? Paul is telling us in verse five that right now we are called to go to "all nations." When Christ came, He first told His disciples to only go to the Jews for that is who He came for, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 10:5-7). Later, Jesus said to the Gentile woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 15:24). So how do we now come to the Gentiles being welcomed in? It was all part of God's plan that we will discuss later in chapters 9-11. For now, however, do not think that the Jews have simply been written off and replaced by the Gentiles. For our Master tells us, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part *until* the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so *all Israel* will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26).

One must examine who "Israel" is here. In the Old Testament the twelve tribes were divided into two segments. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel or Ephraim and consisted of ten tribes that are today called "lost." The Southern Kingdom was called Judah and consisted of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin. At the time of Christ most Jews were from one of these two tribes. The lost ten tribes of Israel had been assimilated into the Assyrian people back in 722 BC. The Samaritans in the time of Christ were a product of this assimilation and were not recognized as Jews but were called Gentiles instead. Thus, some with Jewish blood will be called Gentiles. We see this perhaps being prophesied in Genesis when Jacob blesses Joseph's son Ephraim "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother [Ephraim] will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a *group of nations*" (Gen 48:19-20). The word "nations" here is *Goyim* in Hebrew, which is the word for Gentiles. Could this be a prophecy that Ephraim, the 10 tribes would be assimilated into the Gentile world? Is this why Jesus came for the "lost sheep of ISRAEL?" There are many verses that make a distinction between Judah and Israel and talk about God gathering Israel back to Judah. Consider the following verses:

- Jer 16:19-21 "In the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD. (YAHWEH)"
- Ezek 34:2-13 "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? . . . I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. . . I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks *after his scattered flock* when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. *I will rescue them from all the places where they*

were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land”

- Ezek 36:24-25 “For I will take you from among the heathen, and *gather you out of all countries*, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”
- 1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the *strangers scattered throughout* Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God* the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.
- John 11:51-53 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the *scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one*.
- Hos 1:9 Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.
- Hos 8:8 Israel is swallowed up: *now shall they be among the Gentiles* as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.
- Rom 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.
- John 10:16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and *there shall be one fold*, and one shepherd.
- Jer 31:18 "I have surely heard *Ephraim's moaning*: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. *Restore me, and I will return*, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.
- Isa 11:13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: *Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim*.
- Zech 8:13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, *O house of Judah, and house of Israel*; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.
- Hos 8:8 *Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles* as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.
- Amos 9:9 For, lo, I will command, and *I will sift the house of Israel among all nations*, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.
- Isa 56:3-8 Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things

that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. *The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.*

- Isa 14:1 “The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; *once again he will choose Israel* and will settle them in their own land. *Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.*” Could this be Israel and Gentiles joining Jacob?
- Matt 15:24 “He answered, “I was sent *only* to the lost sheep of Israel.”
- Gal 3:29 *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed*, and heirs according to the promise.
- Heb 12:16,22,23 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. . . But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, *23 to the church of the firstborn*, whose names are written in heaven. Ex 4:22-23 Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: *Israel is my firstborn son.*
- Rev 21:12-13 “It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the *twelve tribes of Israel.*” If all believers have to go through their tribal gate, what about Job, Noah, Adam? What tribe are we and they going to be assigned to?
- Matt 28:18-19 “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples *of all nations*’” Keep in mind that one disciples individuals, not nations. This is the word for Gentiles, which would include the “lost sheep of Israel.”

Yet we see some Gentiles that were not of Jewish blood enter the covenant and become like native born Jews:

- Ezek 47:21-23 “You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. *In*

whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

- Num 9:14 says, “And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the Passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the Passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land.”
- Ex 12:48 “And *when a stranger shall sojourn with thee*, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.”
- Lev 19:34 “But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

I do not want to give you the impression that just because one is a Gentile they are from the lost ten tribes or that all believers are from the lost ten tribes. Clearly strangers like the Egyptians and others were allowed to sojourn with these Jews. Any of them that followed the God of *Israel* were considered to be one of them. Also, I don’t want you to think that only the two tribes were left at the time of Christ. Most were from the tribe of Benjamin (like Paul was) or Judah. However, some of the other ten tribes fled to live with the tribes of Judah when Assyria came, however, their numbers were few. The following are verses showing this to be true:

- 2 Chron 30:5-6,18 “At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: ‘People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. . . 18 Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them.” [note that this is after the 722 BC scattering].
- Acts 26:7 “This is the promise our *twelve tribes* are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.
- James 1:1 “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the *twelve tribes scattered among the nations*.” [This could be a calling for those who were scattered into the Gentile world however.]
- Luke 2:36 “There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of *Asher*.”

Clearly, however, the covenant God made with Abraham was made to the Jewish people. Others can join that covenant, however, that covenant has never been taken away from the Jew. Christ came to gather the lost ten tribes and any that would sojourn with them into that covenant so that “All Israel could be saved.”

Also, keep in mind that verse five tells us that we are called to obedience to the faith. Just as those strangers that joined Israel’s covenant had to sojourn and follow God, likewise, simply believing in this covenant and Jesus Christ doesn’t save. You must have

faith that produces obedience to that covenant. Note, one can not obey and then get faith or salvation from obedience, rather, one must have faith first and Christ produces that obedience in us. James wrote, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (James 2:18-23, see also Rom 15:18; 16:19; 2 Cor 7:15). Clearly, this is why and how you are called of Jesus Christ who now lives in you. As Paul will later write, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Rom 8:9-11).

**7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul tells us the people he is writing to are those in Rome, however, not everybody in Rome, rather the ones who are loved by God and called by Him to be saints. Being "called" implies being separated, as was Paul and the Jewish nation. We are called to be different from the world and not to blend in with it. In other words, we are "consecrated" to God as He makes us holy. Jesus was set apart and consecrated as the Law commanded (Luke 2:23). Peter tells us, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

In the Old Testament, the typical salutation was "peace be to you" (Gen 43:23, Jud 6:23). Now in the New Testament, however, we have the addition of God's abundant grace showing His favor upon us because of Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ, we can have no favor or grace from God. With this said, it is important to understand that even though Grace is seen more clearly in the New Testament, Christ was giving His grace in the Old Testament as well under the Old Covenant or else Abraham, Adam and other old Testament saints could not be listed in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11. Even then, God gave grace to His people as we read in the Psalms, "You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever" (Ps 45:2, See also Prov 3:34). Yet, even so there is a distinction that needs to be made. As the Old Testament saints could only look forward to the grace given them, today we can live in fulfillment of that grace: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law of the Old Covenant was in opposition to grace and was merely a glimpse of God's grace. Later we will read in Romans, "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). Titus explains, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14). Grace can not be achieved by works and

sacrifice which is why the Old Covenant was opposed to grace. Paul warns, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4-5).

Grace is a free favor from God through Jesus Christ. The connection of Christ’s name here with God’s is solid evidence for the divinity of Christ. This type of language runs throughout the Scriptures. The name of no other man can be placed by the side of the Almighty God. Only Jesus, in whom is the Word of the Father, who has become flesh and is Himself God, may be named along with Elohim. This is why we are commanded to honor Jesus just as we honor the Father (John 5:23).

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9 God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Paul was overjoyed with thanksgiving for the faith displayed by the saints in Rome. He gave thanks to God through Jesus Christ. This is a good reminder that we too go through one Man for prayer to God. As we read, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5-6), “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20), “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess His name” (Heb 13:15).

The faith of these saints was being reported all over the world. The word used here is for the Roman world, not the entire earth, although eventually, it was reported throughout the entire earth by these Holy Scriptures.

One must ask how the faith of these Roman saints was displayed? I think we should know the Scriptures well enough to realize that godly works go along with faith and they are and will be displayed through our faith. With this said, however, one must not move this statement into the realm of good works being the source of faith or a measure of faith. Sounds contradictory doesn’t it? That is the fine line where the Spirit dwells. The Scriptures clearly talk about the fruit of the Spirit and obedience that comes from the love of Christ but every Christian is still disobedient in the flesh, yet forgiven in the eyes of Jesus. It is our believing and trusting in the great sacrifice Jesus made on the cross as He took our punishment for our sins upon Himself that makes us a Christian. When we believe that, Christ works in our lives to become more obedient and loving all the time through a process called sanctification (being made holy). The problem is that some have been sanctified further than others and therefore, one must be very careful about judging someone’s salvation based upon works. I think back when I was in highschool I loved to watch television and some sitcoms had ungodly things in them that were not good or right for me to be watching. However, I truly loved my Lord Jesus and believed on Him. God was gracious and later revealed that part of my life as sin. What a blessing came from not watching those things. Later, He revealed the sin of my worldly music and again a great blessing came from giving it up. The point is that God continues to reveal sin to us and we should constantly be sensitive to the Spirits work in our lives.

That will clearly be evidenced by the world. I believe there are many out there whose faith is not reported throughout the world because they are very young in the faith and God is working on their sanctification, yet they are saved because of their unreported, yet genuine faith. It is as Paul admits, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But *each one should be careful how he builds*. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, *wood, hay or straw*, his *work* will be shown for what it is, because *the Day will bring it to light*. It will be revealed *with fire*, and the fire will test the quality of each *man's work*. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*" (1 Cor 3:10-15). Clearly, there are those out there who have the foundation of Jesus Christ but are building upon that foundation with wood hay and straw. I believe these things are false doctrines, fleshly desires, and poor witnesses. However, all sin is forgiven because of their foundation of faith, yet their eternal reward is damaged and they do suffer loss in the kingdom of God. This is one reason why Jesus warns us to "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy" (Matt 6:20).

It is interesting that at such a time when Christianity was not the norm, that these believers were willing to be lights in a dark community and world. When we as believers stand firm in the faith despite the trends of society, God uses it as a witness. Paul said of the Thessalonians, "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess 1:8). Sometimes it takes courage to stand out and go against the flow of this evil world but the courage indeed testifies of God's glory. Peter and John were also courageous witnesses, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13-14). Are people taking note of your courage and witness?

Paul wasn't telling these saints that their faith was famous to puff them up, but rather to encourage and remind them of their calling and influence in the world. Matthew Henry comments on this compliment, "The greater reputation a man hath for religion, the more careful he should be to preserve it." If people are taking note of your faith, you would do well to preserve it through God's grace and His living Word. As we will see in this great book of Romans, though they had a great reputation of faith, there is still need of refinement and correction as there is in all of our lives. Famous faith does not elevate you to perfection in the flesh.

Verse nine shows that just as Paul was witnessing about their faith, Jesus Christ is his witness about his faithfulness to his calling as well. Paul was serving God wholeheartedly in simply preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and praying for the saints.

Part of Paul's prayer was that he may be able to come to share, encourage and be encouraged by one another's company and fellowship in Christ as we will see in the next verses. We could learn from Paul as he not only kept the Roman Christians in prayer but all the churches of God as we see in other places (Eph 6:18, 1 Thess 1:3; 2:13; 5:17). Likewise, today, we too need to remember the Church of God throughout the world, especially those who are facing bodily death due to their faith. If we all did this, can you imagine what a difference it might make within the Christian Church?

Verses nine and ten also evidences the fact that Paul walked in faith and the will of God, as did Jesus. Though NIV says that Paul was serving with his whole heart in verse nine, it is better translated whole “spirit.” We must remember “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer 17:9). Paul wasn’t going to Rome just because he decided it would be a good thing to do, rather he prayed that a way may be opened to him to go. If the Lord didn’t open the doors, he wasn’t going to go. It is as James tells us, “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:14-16). Many today try to open the doors of ministry and travel themselves without God’s leading, only to find out the time or place was not right. We must learn to listen to the Spirit and follow his leading through this same constant, fervent and diligent prayer.

11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong- 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

Paul didn’t just want to see the Roman saints but longed with great desire to be able to be encouraged and to encourage. What sweet fellowship there is with other believers in Christ as we read in Proverbs, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov 27:17). Secondly, Paul wanted to impart some spiritual gift. We are not told what this gift may have been, but we do know that often times the apostles would lay hands on people and a special anointing from the Spirit took place. Since we are not told any of the details, I will leave it at that.

Though Paul had planned many other times to go to Rome, God never opened a door for it to happen because the time for a harvest had not yet come. One such time could have been recorded in Acts 19:21. Nevertheless, all things are best done in God’s time. If we are patient, the fruit will be abundant.

Paul also had an obligation or a debt to both Jew and Gentile alike, whether wise or foolish. In other words, Paul was obligated to Christ in order to share the Gospel with the world. The Gospel isn’t just for intellectuals or wallowing sinners, it is for all that Christ died.

16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Paul had every earthly reason to be ashamed of the Gospel but wasn’t. The world once looked at Paul as a wise Pharisee who had sat under Gamaliel, but now, he was considered a fool. He even admitted, “Up to this moment we have become the scum of

the earth, the refuse of the world” (1 Cor 4:13). Yet there was no reason for Paul to be ashamed because he knew truth beyond a shadow of a doubt, “Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Tim 1:12). “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame’” (Rom 10:11, See also, Rom 1:16; Phil 1:20; Rom 9:33; 2 Tim 1:8; Mark 8:38; 1 Peter 4:16; 1 John 2:28).

Another reason not to be ashamed was that Paul possessed the most powerful weapon in the world. The Gospel is the power of God, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-6). God told Jeremiah, “‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces’” (Jer 23:29)? May we, too, be encouraged because this power is ours also, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). This power which is given to us who believe is there to keep and preserve you in the faith until life everlasting, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, *who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation* that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-6). Indeed Christ, the very Gospel, is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2) and it is now for everyone who believes.

Verse 16 also shows us that this Gospel was given first for the Jew. Only when the Jews rejected the message were the Gentiles welcomed into this Jewish covenant. “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:46-47). We will discuss why this is later in Romans chapters nine and eleven.

Verse 17 tells us that within the Gospel we can see a righteousness that only comes from God. Many believe this “righteousness” is God’s justice. Though there is truth in this, it falls short of the full meaning and intention of the Gospel. First, God’s justice and His forgiveness is often misunderstood. People often say that God just forgives us. This is not a proper understanding of what Christ did. Imagine if your mother was raped by some criminal and the police captured the man so that he went to court to be tried. What would you think if the judge said, “I’m just going to forgive you of this crime and you are free to go.”? You would be very upset because this judge was unjust. Justice demands a penalty. God is just and He can not go against His nature and very being. For this reason, God doesn’t just forgive sins, He had to send His son to pay the penalty and become a curse in our stead. That is justice!

With this said, however, it is the love of God that is the focus of the Gospel, not His justice alone. Some have made the Gospel to simply be the act of justice, but this is being very near-sighted. It is mercy in a manner consistent with justice that is the focus of this righteous Gospel. This mercy is amplified in the following verses: “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in *mercy*, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by *grace* you have been saved” (Eph 2:4-6). “For God so

loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” (John 3:16-18). “May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope” (2 Thess 2:16). You see, man’s way of justice is by works, God’s means of justification is by faith in the one who in mercy was just. This is the “righteousness” and “power” of the Gospel. To be righteous is to be right with God. How can man be right with a perfect God? Man tried and failed to be righteous by obeying the Law. God planned it to be by faith, therein the righteousness of God which is revealed in the Gospel. It is God’s righteousness because it is His perfect plan, not man’s failed plan. For this righteousness to be focused on Christ’s justice over His mercy takes other verses out of context. For example, later in Romans we read, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). Here this righteousness is a gift that is given, not an act or plan of justification. We also read, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). If we are to interpret the righteousness of God here in Romans 1:17 as a plan of justice how does that fit with these above verses? “God made Christ to be sin for us so that in Christ we might become the plan of justification?” Impossible! Paul also states, “I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having *a righteousness of my own* that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-*the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith*” (Phil 3:8-9). Once again, there is a juxtaposition between man’s righteousness that is through works and God’s righteousness that comes through faith. Therefore, the righteousness of God is a gift that is received by faith and can not be earned by obedience. Likewise, it is pointing to a loving and merciful act of God, not a plan for justification.

This righteousness from God was “revealed” to us. Though Noah and Abraham seemed to understand this plan in part, it was not fully disclosed until Christ came. Under the old covenant man had to work and perform sacrifices which could only foreshadow the ultimate plan and goal. In other words, it was the plan of God justifying people by faith that was revealed to us in the Gospel. “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Even before Christ’s death on the cross, Abraham was deemed righteous by faith in the one to come. This has now all been revealed at Christ’s coming and now the righteous or “the just shall live by faith unto faith.”

Though NIV says the “just shall live by faith,” the Greek really reads “shall live by faith unto faith.” In other words, God was faithful to His promises as Paul tells us at the beginning of this chapter that he was separated for the Gospel “which was promised beforehand by the prophets.” Therefore, the just shall live because of God’s faithfulness in bringing forth the promised Gospel and through believing (by faith) in this Gospel. God’s faithfulness in bringing the Gospel doesn’t save you unless you, by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, accept that Gospel. There will be many who have rejected God’s faithfulness that will end up in the fires of hell. It isn’t God’s fault but rather their own. This same idea can be seen throughout the Old Testament as well. In the story of Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac it is commonly understood that Abraham represents God and Isaac represents Christ. This theme is seen throughout

Genesis as Abraham (God) was going to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac (Christ) on Mount Moriah (highest point of Jerusalem built on Mount Zion), the very spot Christ nearly two thousand years later would be sacrificed. The servant in this picture represents the Holy Spirit sent to find a bride (church) for Isaac. When Abraham was asked what to do if the bride did not want to come he said, "If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine" (Gen 24:8). Likewise, today, if anyone refuses to follow after Christ, it isn't the Holy Spirit's fault. God has still been faithful.

The NIV has interpreted this "faith unto faith" passage to mean that it is all about faith from first to last. This isn't necessarily wrong but the wording is more accurate to the Greek as "by faith unto faith." NIV simply is understanding the passage to mean that justification *comes* through faith and is kept or *remains* by faith. It is not as though your justification comes by faith and is kept by works, rather you are justified by faith first and remain righteous by faith to the end. Anything else would nullify what Christ had done on the cross.

This phrase "the just shall live by faith" isn't a new understanding, but rather an old one going all the way back to Habakkuk where we read, "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright- but the righteous will live by his faith-" (Hab 2:4). The context here clearly tells us the wicked are puffed up with pride of their own works, however, in contrast, the righteous will live by faith and not works. This is indeed the meaning Paul was referring to since he is quoting this verse here. Some believe Paul was simply saying that salvation began in faith way back in Habakkuk (or Genesis) for the Old Testament saints and it will end in faith here for the New Testament saints, and thus, from first to last. However, as the Greek reads "through faith unto faith" this interpretation doesn't seem to fit the text well, even though the truth of the statement is consistent with the Scriptures.

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God's wrath is not a element to take lightly. It can not be ignored, in fact, this wrath is even now being revealed from heaven against all the wicked men who suppress and reject the truth of God's Gospel. Indeed, men can by free will, reject this grace and God's faithfulness. The result, however, will only be wrath.

These verses are loaded with meaning, especially for a creationist such as myself. Let me digress for just a moment and talk about DNA.

The average human has over 50 trillion cells and the total DNA from all these cells would only fill about 2 tablespoons. If all these chromosomes in these two tablespoons from one person were stretched out and laid end to end; it would stretch from the earth to the moon and back 5 million times. That is an awesome amount of information. The code in theses chromosomes is more complex and holds more information than all the computer programs ever written by man combined. This DNA is

like a software program, however, it's much more complex than all the programs man has ever been able to design put together. Even with this complexity, however, from conception until birth a baby adds about 15,000 cells per minute to its body, even though each cell is more complex than a space shuttle! How could something like this evolve? It couldn't. Rather, this speaks of a designer, but who could that designer be? Let's reason together for a minute. First, since DNA (the code for life) is information, the conclusion is that there must be a sender who put this information (not just order) in the DNA. Secondly, since DNA information is billions of times greater than our present technology the sender must be supremely intelligent (omniscient). Thirdly, since the sender stored info in DNA molecules and he provided machines to encode, decode and use this info in a variety of ways this sender is purposeful and supremely powerful (omnipotent). Finally, since information is non-material and can not originate from material matter (much like your thoughts are not of material nature but your brain is), the sender must have a non-material nature (Spirit). In short, the sender must have:

- 1) infinite information and intelligence (omniscient)
- 2) infinite power (omnipotent)
- 3) Non-material nature (spirit)

Doesn't this sound like the above verses? "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities [omniscience], His eternal power [omnipotent] and divine nature [Spirit] have been clearly seen, being understood from that which has been made so that men are without excuse." There is no doubt that the Bible clearly tells us that we can see God by looking at His creation. What I have just described to you is part of the Intelligent Design movement sweeping our country. Unfortunately, the courts have ruled that this is religion and should not be taught in the schools. The problem is, it is science and it is pointing to God. I believe science has proven God exists just like Romans tell us it does. However, these so-called scientists are willing to deny and ignore science to keep from becoming religious. Romans is leaving these men "without excuse" so that God's full wrath will come upon them. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them." I truly believe that these men know deep inside that the evidence is pointing to God, our Creator, however, they can not accept it because it would mean that they are being held responsible for their behavior and rejection of the Gospel.

In verse 19 the phrase, "since that which may be known" implies that there are certain things that can not be known about God. Indeed, our human minds can not comprehend the depth of our God, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom 11:33-36). Moses also indicated that there were things that can not be known about God, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). With that said, however, there are things that God has made clear to us about Himself. As discussed above, all we need to do is look as Isaiah tells us, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all

these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing” (Isa 40:26).

What we can see is God’s invisible qualities. We are able to see qualities of God without actually seeing God. For example, God is orderly and we see an orderly creation with orderly laws that keep things operating smoothly. God is love and we see a creation that is lovingly put together that works together in unison. I believe that as Adam named those animals he was able to examine them and see qualities within them that represented God’s character and qualities as well. Thus, in naming the animals, Adam was getting to know God. Likewise, man was made in God’s image and we can see within man, qualities of God without actually seeing Him. For example, just as man is body, soul and spirit, God is a trinity. All of this, not to mention the aspect of DNA that we earlier discussed.

We also see God’s “eternal” power that has no beginning or end. We see that God always has been and it was His power that created the universe out of nothing. Evolutionists believe matter has always existed and an atomic particle called a singularity blew up into the Big Bang. Matter that is eternal goes against known laws of science yet the logic of it is that one must believe in one or the other; eternal God or eternal matter. Nonetheless, in His creation there is ample evidence to show that He is above all created things and thus the idolatry of the pagans is clearly sin. They will not be able to claim ignorance as a defense before the Holy throne of God.

Finally, we see God’s divine nature showing Him not to be in sinful flesh as we now stand, nor is he a spirit of nature (mother nature). Indeed, our God is supernatural and the creation itself could have no natural origin. Life can not come from non-life as the laws of science prove. Paul used creation to clearly show the Athenians that only God gives life, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:24-25).

Sadly, these verses are a commentary on our society today. As I go out and do street evangelism a haunting truth keeps loudly appearing. If we can’t answer the modern day faith questions of creation, there is no reason to share the Gospel at all because it is of no effect and beyond understanding. Let me explain the modern day faith questions. I am constantly asked, “Where did Cain get his wife?” or “How do you fit dinosaurs into the Bible?” The attitude is that if there are no answers to these questions then the Bible must be wrong, including the message of Jesus Christ.

About 150 years ago the Biblical idea that the earth was only a few thousand years old was being challenged by the scientific community. The church decided that it wasn’t an important issue because as long as the Bible was the authority on moral issues and salvation, then the world could have their science. They intentionally, but not wisely, separated God’s Word from real life issues.

Clarence Darrow, in the famous Scopes Trial of 1925 did the same thing in the courts of law. He asked the question, “Where did Cain get his wife?” William Jennings Bryan didn’t have an answer for him so, as a result, he challenged the historical accuracy of the Scriptures. If there is no logical sense as to how Cain got his wife, then the Bible isn’t accurate. First of all, we know that Cain married his sister and there is perfect scientific reason as to how this was acceptable. When the perfect gene pool of Adam and

Eve was in existence, brother and sister could marry, have children and all would be fine. After the Flood, the radiation from the sun began to corrupt the gene pool and God finally puts a stop to this in the book of Leviticus. (You may watch our Pre-Flood World video for further information). In any case, there are answers to Darrow's question.

My question to you is this: Are we, like Bryan, not able to answer these very questions posed to the church each and every day? In your Sunday School program I am sure you are teaching about Jesus, Daniel and the Lions Den, Adam and even Noah. But are you teaching Biology, Geology and Astronomy in your Sunday School program? You see, even today we are subconsciously separating God's Word from real life issues. What is the difference between Daniel and the Lion's Den verses Little Red Riding Hood? The pictures of Noah's Ark we paint all over our preschool walls look like a cartoon, not a real history story. How do our children know how to make the distinction from truth and mere story?

Out on the street we hear people saying things like this all the time: "Oh, you are trying to tell me it's wrong to get drunk? Based on what? Oh, your Bible? Science has proven that book wrong. It was just written by men." You see, we are trying to impose morality upon a society that doesn't accept the foundation of that morality. How can we tell anyone what is morally right or wrong if the Bible we use to say something is right or wrong isn't the Word of God? The famous actor, Bruce Willis, said, "Organized religion used to hang the whole thing on one hook: If you don't do these things, if you don't act morally, your going to burn in hell. Unfortunately, with what we know about science, anyone who thinks at all probably doesn't believe in fire and brimstone anymore. So organized religion has lost that voice to hold up their moral hand." (USA Weekend Magazine, Cincinnati, Enquirer. Feb 11-13, 2000 p.7.). Do you see what he is saying? The same thing we hear on the street when people say we have no right to say what is right or wrong if the Bible is not God's Word.

Carl Sagan, the famous (but now dead) evolutionary astronomer said, "Look at this world out there, all the mistakes, all the mutations, and the death and suffering and disease. Where's a god of love? Where is your powerful God? I don't see a powerful God.." He is saying the same thing we hear out on the street all the time. People say, "I don't believe in God, He let my best friend get killed in a car accident," or "I don't believe in God, where was He when my step dad was beating me?" They don't believe in God because if God existed, why is there death and struggle in this world when God is supposed to be a God of love? Think about it. What could you have said to Carl Sagan or any of these people we meet out on the street if there is no literal Adam and Eve which brought about literal sin, which brought about literal death, disease and suffering? If Adam is not literal history, Christians have no explanation for things like 9/11 or the tsunami that just killed over a 150,000 people. The very fact that you are alive speaks of Adam's literal existence because you had a literal mom and dad who had a literal mom and dad who had a literal mom and dad all the way back to Adam.

We read in Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The Bible is very clear that death is in this world because there was a literal Adam who sinned. Death, suffering and disease will be here until the Lord comes to take us home. But in the meantime, this Gospel is not understood because sin, death and the curse are not understood. The world is out throwing Satan's flaming arrows at the cross. As the arrow

hits the foundation of Genesis, a literal Adam and Eve, a young earth etc., in front of the cross, the church is saying, "It didn't hit the cross." But what they don't realize is that the very foundation of the cross, Genesis, is being destroyed. If the world attacks the cross the church gets into an uproar, but if it attacks the foundation, they don't see it is an attack against the cross. Psalm 11:3 states, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Today, our foundation of God as Creator is being removed from our churches and society and the Gospel is being destroyed.

Many people have come up to me and said, "You can't say that just because I believe in evolution that I'm going to hell." First of all, I never say that because I don't believe that at all. However, I usually respond this way, "I'm not worried about your salvation. I'm worried about the faith of those people whom you are destroying because of the compromising and contradictory message you are giving them. Do you believe Jesus is your Savior?" When they say "Yes," I reply, "How do you know that." They usually say, "It says in the Bible that . . ." Now I quickly interrupt and say, "Wow, wait a minute. You mean you are going to quote that book to say that Jesus is your Savior but I can't quote that same book to say the Jesus is the Creator of a young earth?" You see we have to be consistent. We can't quote the Bible on the things we like and throw out those verses we don't. Yet this is what many Christians and churches are doing.

We are leaving out creation as a vital part of evangelism. Perhaps this is one reason we read in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Notice that the same message of Jesus Christ is received in two different ways. To the Jew the cross is a stumbling block and to the Gentile the same cross is outright foolishness. The reason for this is that the Jew had understood the basic ABC's of Christianity. They knew that God created them, it was just a stumbling block to understand that the Savior He was going to send was this suffering servant, Jesus. The Gentile, however, did not understand creation or that God was sending the Messiah. Therefore, to say that Jesus is the Christ is foolishness when they aren't convinced that the Father was real to begin with. Jesus himself said, no one can come to him except through the Father. In Acts 10:38-41 we see Peter witnessing to Cornelius, a believing Gentile practicing the Jewish ways and, therefore was of the Jewish mindset. Peter evangelized by saying, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. . . They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen." Notice the message was Christ crucified and it worked well. You can also see similar examples in Acts 13:23 and Acts 17:1-3.

When the disciples go to Gentiles there is a completely different witnessing style. In Acts 17:23-25 we read, "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." Here the message was creation, not Christ. The foundation had to be laid before Christ would move from foolishness to merely a stumbling block. Read Acts 14:11-16 for another example of this. In every case a Gentile is preached to the message is creation but in every case it is a Jew, the cross is the focus.

I propose that the church is giving Christ to people when they first need creation. We go out and tell them about the love of Jesus when they aren't prepared to understand who Jesus is, let alone His love. If I tell you Jim loves you but you don't know who Jim is, do you really care about Jim's love? I believe that our society is more like the Gentile mindset than the Jewish one. Most people today do not have an understanding of creation and who God is let alone His promise to send a Savior. Those that do have an understanding of God, often only have a head-knowledge of who He is and don't truly believe in their heart that God created this world in six-24 hour days. Because of this, they don't believe in God's Word and have no faith. Is it any wonder that those people on the street think it is foolishness for me to be telling them about Jesus when in their mind the Bible has been proven wrong by evolution?

Carl Sagan said in the 1985 Pocket Book by Simon & Schuster, "If God is omnipotent and omniscient, why didn't he start the universe out in the first place so it would come out the way that he wants? Why is he constantly repairing and complaining? No, there's one thing the Bible makes clear: the biblical God is a sloppy manufacturer. He's not good at design, he's not good at execution. He'd be out of business if there was any competition" (pg 285). Is it any wonder that the world is lost? If only Carl Sagan had understood Creation, he would have understood the Fall and the reason for death, disease and suffering. God is and was a perfect Designer. But I guess Sagan was right on one thing, there is no competition. There is only one God, and like it or not, if He created you, He sets the rules for your life. If you disobey those rules you will have to answer to Him, your Creator. This is why we as Christians do judge. The most quoted verse of today is "Do not judge lest ye be judged." This is taken completely out of context because the Bible says we are to judge the church and sin, just not salvation. John tells us to "Judge righteously" but without a literal creation and a literal truth in Scripture, there is no standard to judge by. May the church open their eyes and stop compromising on this important issue of Creation because it is a primary source of understanding who God is.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

As we read in the previous verses, men are without excuse to deny God's existence, even if they claim to be an atheist. God made these men and they know this deep down in their inner spirits, however, they still refuse to give God the credit and thank Him for their daily provisions. This is why verse 21 can clearly state that they did indeed know God. Rather than submit, praise and glorify their Creator, however, these ungodly men became depraved and literally stupid. Their thoughts were filled with futile things that were a waste of time and bring no reward. I can't help but think of our society today. We have many who believe in evolution, a theory that takes more faith and illogical reasoning than Christianity. Not only does evolution go against science, but it flies in the face of common sense and the spiritual world. There are two ways of looking at things, a worldly, material perspective and a spiritual, supernatural one. Evolution is silly on both accounts. There are times I sit in awe at what people believe and say

because their thinking is so futile and illogical. I watch the political arena and see people idolizing immoral politicians that get caught in outright lies and immorality, yet the public continues to think these people are honest and upright. Indeed, our country has been given over to foolish, dark hearts just as has been happening since time began. The same process continues. People wander away from the God that they only have the head-knowledge of, but do not love. As they become dissatisfied with His character, nature and rules and they puff themselves up with pride thinking they know better than this Almighty omniscient God. The result is that they fall into the darkness of foolishness, sin and judgment.

The politicians and especially the evolutionists consider themselves to be wise and learned men as they ridicule and look down on people who accept the Bible as the literal Word of God. These men have willingly exchanged or denied the blessings of God's glory for the self-serving and self destructive pride of self-centered idol worship. They find glory in mortal men and animals that not only can't help these ungodly men, but even abuse and use them, leading them to the depths of hell. What foolishness! Today, in our society one can get a stiffer sentence from beating a dog than from beating a wife. We idolize sports stars and spend billions of dollars to save the whales and other animals that have become more valued than a little child. We spend billions of dollars on ice-cream and make-up, yet there are people starving throughout the world. We put our pets on anti-depressants and take them to pet psychologists and still have the gall to say that we are wise. We look to the rocks and crystals for energy, health and oneness with nature. We have drug abusing rock-stars singing about Jesus and the abuses of alcohol. We keep throwing money at our public schools in hopes that it will make our children learn while we allow them to swear and be disrespectful in dress, language and behavior. We teach our children they came from monkeys and show violent movies in the classroom under the guise of education, yet we can't figure out why these same students shoot other students in schools and are getting pregnant at 12 years old. Indeed, thinking we are wise we have become fools. Look at how many Ph.d's know their 1,2,3's and ABC's, yet are fools because "the fool says in his heart, there is no God" (Ps 53:1). Yet, should we be surprised? Paul tells us, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21).

Ultimately, these verses are discussing the Gentiles since it was to the Jews that God had revealed Himself personally through His Word. Psalms states, "He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws" (Ps 147:19-20). Paul even spoke to the Gentiles of Lystra saying, "In the past, He let all nations go their own way. Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:16-17). Even though God was not walking among the Gentiles He was still speaking them through the creation, His providence, and His people, the Jews. With this said, however, even the Jews became corrupt by rejecting this up close and personal Word. Psalms tells us they did the same thing as they got sucked into the world's culture and did not remain separate, "They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass. They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt" (Ps 106:20-21). Isaiah also records, "Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not

gods at all.) But My people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols” (Jer 2:11). God made man in His image and man has repaid Him by making God into man’s image just as God warned them not to do: “You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below” (Deut 4:15-19). Let us not make the same mistake.

It is also important that we do not take too much confidence in the simple fact that we know God and His rules. Without a saving relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit can not give you the understanding of His Word. “How can you say, ‘We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,’ when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely” (Jer 8:8). Knowing God’s law and handling it properly are two separate issues. One must not rely on his own reasoning and apply these verses out of context, or out of the fleshly desires. The Spirit is necessary for our understanding, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:12-15).

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen.

Verse 24 is a key to understanding much in our society today. In the previous verses we saw that men rejected God as their Creator, much like we see happening today. The result of doing so was that God “gave them over” to the desires of their hearts. This does not mean that God makes them do evil, rather that God leaves them alone or no longer helps or restrains them. God is no longer with them to be their strength, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps 73:26). This is not a new idea because God has been “giving men over” since time began, “So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices” (Ps 81:12). Apart from God man is a lost soul. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). When your treasure is no longer of God and His loving law, your heart is allowed to follow anything but God. We know that without God, our heart is deceitful (Jer 17:9, Hos 1:8). We are born sinful in the flesh and we need God’s Spirit to teach and guide us as the Psalmist said, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Ps 51:5-6). We must remember that, “All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Prov 21:2). This is why we need to pray that God never leave us alone to our own desires because they are indeed evil. In every decision we should examine if it measures up to God’s standards and make sure God is going with you. When the Israelites tried to enter the promised land after rejecting God, He rejected them and refused to go with them. The result was that the army who tried to take the land was killed (Num 14:41). Likewise, Moses said, “If your

Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here” (Ex 33:15-16) because he knew that without God man would fail.

What is in the heart of man? When God gives them over to their own desires the result is “sexual immorality and the degrading of their bodies with one another.” Sexual sins have serious consequences. We often hear that sin is sin and that homosexuality is just as bad as promiscuous heterosexuality. It is true that sin is sin and one sin left uncovered by the blood of Jesus is enough to send you to hell, however, the consequences of sin apart from damnation are different. Even when forgiven the consequences often still stand. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden because of their sin, they were forgiven, however, the consequences still remained. I’m sure they were begging God to get back into the Garden and promising not to ever eat of that tree again yet God said something like, “You are right, you won’t do it again because I’m not letting you go back in.” The consequences of sin still apply even when we are forgiven. Some sins have more serious consequences than others. For example, if you tell a little white lie, a sin serious enough to send you to hell, but typically, not one that will have life-long consequences on earth. Yet, the sin of divorce affects you and your children for an entire lifetime. This doesn’t mean you aren’t forgiven, but Biblically sexual sins do have more dire consequences.

Almost every major civilization before us has first become corrupt sexually, before it was destroyed. The Romans, the Greeks, cities like Pompeii and many others were all very sexually immoral. God warned us after giving a long list of sexual sins, “For all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you” (Lev 18:27-28). Sexual sins will defile a land and God promises that the land will vomit you out of it. This should make us fear for cities like San Francisco, indeed, even countries like America as a whole. As we watch homosexuality, sodomy, heterosexual promiscuity, internet pornography and debauchery growing quickly and running rampant in this country one must wonder (if not already know it) that we have been “given over” to the desires of our heart because we have rejected God as Creator. Any civilization that rejects God as Creator becomes corrupt and sexually immoral and Romans just explained why.

Verse 25 says that they “exchanged the truth of God for a lie.” This phrase is common in the Hebrew Old Testament as “the true God,” therefore, they exchanged the true God for the lie of idols. This truth is reflected in the Old Testament where we read of those given over to their own desires, “He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’” (Isa 44:20)? Also, “Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them” (Jer 10:14). The idols weren’t the source of the lie, rather it comes from the father of lies but the end result is the same. “Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies?” (Hab 2:18).

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one

another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Verse 26 continues with the words “Because of this,” indicating it is the same cause as the above verses, that being rejection of God as Creator. Once again, God “gave them over” to themselves and their own desires.

I believe there is a need to go into the idea of homosexuality a bit deeper here due to the growing acceptance and tolerance of sin in this corrupt generation. I recently went to listen to Davis Mallory at the Hastings College Campus. Davis is a so-called “Christian” who came out of the closet on an MTV reality program. He had nearly 400 people who came to listen to his testimony where he used many Scriptures (out of context of course) to justify the practice of homosexuality. I was appalled to look around while he was speaking and see many young men and women who claim the faith of Christ, nodding in approval and laughing right along with his inappropriate jokes. When it was over there was a chance for questions to be asked. I hoped some might bring light into the darkness but nothing was said so I of course had to say something. I basically tried to tactfully and politely challenge him on what it means to be a Christian, and that sin in general, besides homosexuality, will send us to hell if we do not have a saving relationship with Jesus. I wasn’t able to get my full point across because he had control of the microphone, but I was able to bring in some light and it allowed us to take things a bit further later on. Mallory ended the conversation simply by saying, “Judge not, lest ye be judged” and about 98% of the crowd erupted in cheers. Before we left a lady from the newspaper wanted to interview me, which I did. However, I think I gave too much Scripture for her liking because nothing I said was used in the paper, outside of the fact that I questioned Mallory. My spirit was extremely heavy and saddened by this culture of acceptance and those who trample on the great grace of God, using it for a license to sin.

If you would like you can watch the video of Mallory and his testimony as well ask the questions I posed to him and a radio segment that followed the event to get truth out there. All are posted on our website at www.creationinstruction.org in the audio section under “resources.”

One of the most common misconceptions on this topic is that homosexuals are “born that way.” That is not what the Bible indicates as I will explain, however, before I do I want to make clear that even if it were, it wouldn’t change the fact that it is sinful to practice homosexuality. I was born sinful as well as Psalm 51:5 says, “Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” I came out of the womb with selfishness at the core of my being. Most men have been born with the propensity to lust after women. Does this make lusting okay? Absolutely not! I remember even after I got married there were many times I would see a pretty woman walking down the street and I would think, “Wow, she’s beautiful” and would have lust in my heart. This is sin as the Bible clearly says “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-29). Of course, this is one of the Ten Commandments that I broke by committing adultery. Though I was born with this lust in my heart, it didn’t give me an excuse to act on it. In fact, I had to work hard, by first recognizing it as sin and then praying and calling upon God to heal my eyes. I had to resist the temptations. Every time I saw an attractive woman, rather than choosing to gaze upon her, I chose to look

away and resist evil. James even tells us this when he wrote, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:7-10). Note that one must first humble themselves before the Lord can and will lift them up. If we refuse to recognize sin as sin and, therefore, refuse to repent and humble ourselves, God will never lift you up or help you overcome the sins of the flesh. Yet, through Christ, we gain victory over sin as millions of Christians testify. Anyone struggling with homosexuality must first recognize it as sin and then repent as they continue to resist the devil. God will answer their heartfelt prayers and heal their mind and eyes.

If homosexuals aren't born gay, then why are they this way? One of the questions I asked Davis was whether or not he believed in a literal interpretation of Creation. For most in the crowd this was a strange question to ask but I had a reason. The following night I was speaking at the same campus for an FCA group and some were there that night. I wanted them to hear the answer because in that answer lies the answer to why people are gay. Let's look at these verses in Romans once more: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, [Note that God's wrath is against those who suppress truth by ignoring the sin] 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. [God has made sin plain to us, we just have to sear our conscience] 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. [Everyone can see God by looking at His creation] 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. [THIS IS KEY, those who suppress truth, reject God as Creator, thereby rejecting the rules of the Creator. They are, however, without excuse as verse 20 said] 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. [BECAUSE they rejected God, He GAVE THEM OVER to sin] 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen. 26 Because of this, [Because of what? Because they rejected God as Creator] God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. [Davis said that there were no examples of female to female relationships in the Bible yet it says so right here in the New Testament] 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. 28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done (Rom 1:18-27). [Davis said that it doesn't say homosexuality was sin but only unnatural as verse 26 says. He explained that homosexuality is just not the norm and, therefore, unnatural or not common. However, here verse 27 says clearly it is a perversion.]

From Romans chapter 1 we can clearly see that when we reject God as Creator and rule giver He gives us over to the sinful desires of the flesh. Therefore, the first step for a homosexual to help himself is to recognize that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and, as the Bible states, God created the world about six thousand years ago. It is no accident that I have found no homosexual who believes in a six, 24 hour day creation that took place only a few thousand years ago. Instead, they have submitted to the world's philosophies and have not trusted in faith, the Word of God. This lack of faith leads to a giving over to a depraved mind (v.28). Isn't it interesting that in our society, creation, and thus our Creator, is being denied, yet we see a nation being filled with depraved minds that lack all common sense and logic.

Earlier we discussed that the Gospel is foolishness to a Gentile thinking person (1 Cor 1:23). This is why anytime Paul or Peter witnessed to a Jew (who had an understanding of creation and the basics of the Bible) they preached a clear Gospel. However, any time they went to a Greek thinking person, they start preaching creation first (Acts 14:11-16; 17:23-25). If creation isn't a foundation, the Gospel and all that goes with it is foolishness as we read in Acts, "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbling trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.'" They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection." (Acts 17:18). They didn't understand the Gospel because they didn't understand the beginning. This is also why the Scriptures say, "If they believe not Moses [Genesis was written by Moses] and the Prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). And, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom you trust. For had you believed Moses, you would have believed My Words" (John 5:45-47). Davis didn't believe Moses and the creation account so why would he believe the rest of the Words of God.

Every time a Christian tries to point out this truth that homosexuality is sin, we are accused of hate speech or stirring up problems. My question that was posed to Davis was posted on you-tube on the internet. One of the comments was that we were there to protest and cause controversy. Nothing could be further from the truth. I heard a pastor recently discuss the television hit, "American Idol." In the beginning shows they allow contestants to sing before the judges to find out if they qualify for the show. Some who sing are literally no better than dogs howling and make complete fools of themselves. Once the judges rip them apart verbally, they usually come out crying saying something like, "these judges don't know what they are talking about, and all of my friends tell me I'm a good singer." What kind of friends do these people have? I think it is time for these people to get new friends. A true friend isn't somebody who lies to you just to make you feel good so that later you can make a fool of yourself, or worse, be eternally condemned. A true friend is someone who loves and cares for you enough to tell you the truth, even if it hurts. These are the kind of people I like to have as friends. Likewise, if I know the Words of the Bible to be true, and I don't warn those practicing homosexuality that this is sin, I don't love them. If I hated them, I wouldn't warn them to get off the tracks when a train was rushing towards them. If I love them, I will do everything I can to warn them that they may be saved.

Also, I have a responsibility to tell the wicked of sin as Ezekiel says, "When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade

him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself" (Ezek 3:18-19). When Davis quoted out of context, "judge not, lest ye be judged" the audience roared in applause. This is not love. Davis was claiming to be a Christian of which he was not. The Bible clearly tells us that we have a responsibility to judge those who live in sin but call themselves Christians, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (1 Cor 5:12-13). God expects the world to behave in ungodly ways, but He expects much more from the church. The Bible does NOT tell us to ignore judgment, but rather when we judge we are to judge righteously, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24).

This leads to another reason as to why I believe we are seeing so much homosexuality today. We judge by appearance, not by God's Word. I know personally many who have questioned their sexuality purely because it was questioned by someone else. I believe that if Jacob and Esau were alive today, our society very likely could have been pushing Jacob into homosexuality. We see the Bible says that Esau was a daddy's boy and Jacob was a mama's boy. Jacob liked to stay home and do things around the house whereas Esau was more of a manly outdoorsman. Today, if a man doesn't fit the norm of what a man is suppose to do, sound like or act like, his sexuality is put into question through teasing, poking fun at and sometimes even telling them they are gay. Just because a man doesn't have a desire or attraction to women doesn't mean they are gay. In fact, it could be a blessing. It may be best to go read the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 7 but for now I will highlight the message where Paul says that it is better not to marry if you don't have lust. He says in verse seven that he wishes that all men were as he was and not be confined by marriage so that he could serve the Lord with undivided attention. Therefore, Paul didn't struggle with the lusting after women. Would our society think Paul was gay? Ironically, the gay community even uses these verses to say that Paul maybe was gay. "It is good for a man not to marry. 2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. . . 7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that . . . I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-how he can please his wife- 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world-how she can please her husband. 35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor 7:7-35). Paul wasn't gay, he was gifted by God according to verse 7. For this reason, we must be careful not to push people into the sinful act of homosexuality by judging men unrighteously.

It makes me very sad to see that even many in the church are trying to say that homosexuality is okay. Yet the Bible warns us, "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. 5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that

the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. 8 In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. 9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals-these are the very things that destroy them. 11 Woe to them!" (Jude 3-13). Peter also warns, "He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6).

Two very important points in these verses. First, godless men will and obviously have slipped in among the church and we must not allow them to remain in fellowship with us (1 Cor 5). Secondly, Davis said that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was rape, not homosexuality. This is another lie and taking the Bible out of context. Here in the New Testament it says it was sexual immorality and perversion. The same perversion that was done by the angels of Genesis 6:4. It had nothing to do with rape, but rather sexual immorality. I believe God was not concerned ONLY with homosexuality but heterosexual sins as well. As said earlier, anything outside of God's union modeled in the Garden of Eden would be sin. God showed us what a marriage was to be when he made the two become one flesh in the Garden. He made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. Corinthians explains, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? [Note, even heterosexual sins are immorality] Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body' (1 Cor 6:15-20). Homosexuality and heterosexual sins do not honor God. Romans also says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

One other comment on Davis's assertion that Sodomy had nothing to do with homosexuality. According to the Nave's Topical Bible, it states this of SODOMITES, "(The inhabitants of Sodom, many of whom openly practiced homosexuality) And is applied to males. ((Electronic Database Copyright (c)1990 by Biblesoft and TriStar Publishing). Sodomy is homosexuality no matter what twist you try and put on it. It was no surprise that the rest of Davis's testimony was full of comments and statements that showed he was clearly not a Christian, even as someone who would not be practicing homosexuality. He swore publicly while chuckling, talked of being promiscuous before coming out and of much partying and other ungodly living. There was enough evidence

to convict him of willful sin beyond his homosexuality. A favorite tactic of the homosexual community is to point out sin in our lives and then tell us a sin is a sin in God's eyes. (On the video you will see Davis tried to find fault with me and was hoping that my wife was "sinning" by working outside of the home. This clearly shows Davis has no understanding of the context of the Bible). First of all, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 6, sexual immorality is a sin different than all others. Secondly, the key is not in the sin, but in the attitude of the heart of the person sinning. As a Christian, I continue to sin, but not without a guilty conscience, repentance and a desire to stop sinning. A man destined to hell can claim he is Christian but the willful desire to live in sin shows he is not a saved man. This is why even Paul said, "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Rom 7:16-20). Paul sinned, but not with a desire to do so. Davis sins and has obviously "been given over to the sinful desires of his heart." But as Christians, "Now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom 7:6). I now obey the Spirit of God which has put the law in my heart so I obey because I want to, not because I have to. If Davis doesn't want to obey God's law, he must not be a Christian. Interestingly, on the video you can see Davis had a very nervous countenance upon him when the law was given to him. I believe his spirit was being pricked but his flesh and pride would not allow him to let truth in. We read in the Bible, "The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves" (Isa 3:9).

It is time the church is challenged as to what a true Christian is. It is interesting how many times I have heard people tell me that they pray, but it just doesn't seem as if God is listening. Well, the truth is, maybe He isn't listening because of your sin. We read in the Psalms, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps 66:18). So many people view God as a magic genie that they can call upon whenever they wish, without having any relationship with Him. They don't go through repentance to get to the cross to find that relationship. Their iniquities keep them separate from God. Colossians states, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior" (Col 1:21-22). This is the exact opposite of the secular view of man's relationship to God without Christ. The world wants to see God as a loving God that forgives sin automatically and has no requirements or standards. One night while witnessing a young woman came out of the bar and began talking with us, more out of curiosity than anything. We visited for a bit and she explained that she was a bisexual and had been drinking. After walking her through the Ten Commandments and establishing that she was guilty, she didn't seem to really care much about this fact. She even told me that she really didn't care much about what the Bible said and never read it. After a while you get used to reading people by their expressions and behaviors. I could tell that I was getting nowhere with this woman and there were other people standing around who might be more fruitful and open to the Word. I decided the seeds had been planted and it was time to move on, so I was about to reach out my hand to shake hers and tell her thanks for

coming over to talk, but just before I could move a muscle she blurted out, "I pray at night." I quickly told her it was nice that she prayed, but God wasn't really listening and that He even hated her prayers. Obviously, she didn't take too kindly to that and was puzzled by my statement. I stopped and opened up my Bible to Proverbs 28:9, turned it around and pointed at the verse and told her to read it out loud for me. She read, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer is an abomination." I reminded her that she had just been telling me that she was turning her ear away from the Law and didn't care that she was bisexual and drinking. Then I asked her, "What does God see your prayers as?" She looked at me for the first time with all seriousness and concern in her face and said, "an abomination." That led into a 45 minute conversation that led her getting into a church. I had to take away all her hopes of self-righteousness because she felt that since she prayed and believed in God she was saved. The problem was, she had heard the Gospel before, but she never understood what it truly meant. The Law of the Lord is what opens up the spiritual eyes of understanding. This woman was a false convert. Psalms says, "The Law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" (Ps 19:7). How many of these kinds of people do we have among us in the church today? The Bible tells us of the Christian, "Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:9-11). No wonder so few Christians have joy today. Consider also the following verses: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7). "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:3-6). "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:2-5). "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9). [Remember, hate is not telling them the truth].

The Bible also says there is hope if our nation will turn to righteousness: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov 14:34). "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron 7:13-15).

Despite all the wickedness and the evil of this world, God is not mocked. "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed one. "Let us break their chains," they say," and throw off their fetters." The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." (Ps 2:1-6).

Verse 27 tells us that both the men and the women who practice such vile behavior receive the due penalty for this perversion. Indeed, throughout history we can see God punished those who practice sexual immorality along with other sins. At Sodom God brought the fires of hell from heaven and destroyed them all, serving as an example for us today, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire" (Jude 7). There is much historical and archaeological evidence of the Roman and Greek sexual sins and the resulting destruction of their nation. The historian Tacitus even tells us that in the Roman world new words had to be coined to explain the vile behaviors of these reprobate minds. History tells us that China and other countries also were filled with this vile sin. Now, our own country has been infected and our "due penalty" for this perversion is coming. If interested in finding out more of the historical roots one may read in Tholuck's "Nature and moral Influence of Heathenism."

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Once more the word, "Furthermore" indicates that what we are about to read is due to the same cause, that being, rejecting God as Creator. Once man has been "given over" to his own heart, it seems a waste of time to think about and retain knowledge of God. This is because one does not have the ability to believe or even the ability to have a desire to believe unless God draws him to do so. Jesus clearly points out, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). God has given all men the opportunity but few will take it. We read in Timothy, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-5). Even though this saving grace is offered to all, Jesus knew the hearts of men and said, "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14). Few will believe, not because they didn't have the opportunity, but because they tried to enter into the kingdom of heaven by going through ways other than Jesus. Paul tells us in chapter nine, "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? *Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works*" (Rom 9:30-32). Jesus also warned "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:4-5). Unless a man willfully repents of his sinful flesh and the evil desires within his heart and accept the free gift of faith, he will perish. God, in his mercy and grace has given you the ability, but will you accept it? Those that don't will eventually be given over and will have no desire to repent and acknowledge God. The same has always been true as we see in Job, "Yet they say to God, 'Leave us

alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?’ But their prosperity is not in their own hands, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked” (Job 21:14-16). Even in the Exodus we see this truth unfold as we read that at first Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but after doing so for a length of time God finally withdrew His mercy and hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Therefore, when we willfully ignore God as Creator and think it “not worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God” our Creator will punish with judicial justice.

Verse 29 shows that once you have been given over, you don’t just have evil within you, but you become filled with “every kind” of it. Peter testifies to this fullness of evil as he writes, “With eyes *full* of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are *experts* in greed-an accursed brood” (2 Peter 2:14-15). In Ephesians we read, “Having *lost all sensitivity*, they have *given themselves over* to sensuality so as to indulge in *every kind* of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Eph 4:19). Once the sensitivity of the Spirit is removed when God gives you over, you will then give yourselves over to all sorts of sin.

The long list beginning in verse 29 barely touches the true evil that is within man. *Wickedness* shows the evil intent in the mind, *evil* shows a source that is from satan, *greed* reveals the self-centeredness of this sin, *depravity* shows the entire mind is hopelessly foolish, *envy* shows a longing to feed the flesh, *murder* shows the evil extent people will go to satisfy themselves, *strife* reveals the anger and unrest brought about as men selfishly can’t get along, *deceit* declares the hidden darkness within the mind, and *malice* shows the mischievousness and hatred in the heart. *Gossips* and *slanderers*, are people who talk about others to make themselves look and feel good. It isn’t enough for them to just deny God, rather, they know He exists and *hate* Him. This is why they are insolent and rude towards anything good. Hatred brings out the worst in a person. Arrogance and boasting work together as well. Arrogant men think so highly of themselves and so little of others that they feel they must boast about themselves in order to raise themselves above others, including God. Today many new religious movements have people claiming that they are god. How arrogant!

When one is depraved he must invent ways of doing evil to outdo others. Evilness in itself can be a form of pride. Not only this but sin has a way of getting old and one must continue to go deeper into the darkness to keep the same gratification. Drugs and alcohol are a good example of how you have to have more to get the same buzz. The same is true of delighting in sin.

Disobedience to parents and authority is also considered to be “cool” in the eyes of fools. We see this displayed even in our television programs today where men are weak if they love their wives and children are seen as smarter than their parents. The truth is that it isn’t cool to be *faithless, senseless and ruthless*. The very definition of these words suggest folly and stupidity, yet somehow, the ungodly think they are wise. In the Old Testament God commanded disobedient children to be “rocked” to sleep (stoned). This was a serious offense to God because if one could not learn to obey his parents, he certainly would not learn to obey God. As we do jail ministry it is no accident that when you ask criminals to name the Ten Commandments, honoring your father and mother are almost never mentioned.

To be *heartless* is to be without emotion; especially that of love and compassion. In the Old Testament it says that parents were sacrificing their own children in the fire to

pagan gods (Ps106:37, 2 Chron 33:6). In Deuteronomy we read of some Israelites who had been given over to their enemies and to their own lusts by God. God predicted that “The most gentle and sensitive woman among you--so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot--will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities” (Deut 28:56-57). Today, we see people being so heartless as to mutilate young children in the wombs, and in some cases, outside of the womb. Children are beaten and abused physically, emotionally and sexually. There is no compassion for even their own family, let alone a stranger.

This list of sins shows that nearly all the commandments have been broken. Nonetheless, we know that breaking one commandment means we break them all (James 2:10). Verse thirty shows that they are *God-haters* and thus break the first of the commandments. Disobeying parents breaks the fifth commandment and is certainly visible in our society today. We have so many disobedient children because we have disobedient parents. Matthew Henry comments on these verses, “Disobedient children are justly punished with unnatural parents; and, on the contrary, unnatural parents with disobedient children.” Verse 31 goes on to show there is a breaking of the sixth commandment with all kinds of wickedness, maliciousness, envy, murder, and contentious strife. All of these reflect a hatred of our neighbor and brother, which as Jesus said in Matthew 5 is at the very heart of murder. The seventh commandment is broken in fornication. The eighth commandment is broken in envy and covetousness. The ninth commandment is broken in their deceit, lying and slandering. Clearly, there is no fruit of faith in these men. As we discussed earlier, one can trace all these sins running rampant in virtually every ancient civilization that is now destroyed. Paul was writing to the Roman church in which all the earlier manifestations of God’s power and existence had been displayed through His creation, yet utterly ignored. Will this country learn from these lessons or fall under the same judgment?

Although they know what the judgment of God is and that His justice requires death, they further their guilt as they continue to willfully sin anyway. As we read in James, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17). When we love something, it naturally means we must have a hate for anything that goes against that which we love. I love children and, therefore, I hate abortion. Likewise, because I love God, I must hate sin. These men who have been given over to sin, however, not only continue to do the sin themselves, but approve of others who practice this sin. They do not love God or they would hate sin and being around others that do so as well. They have joined the father of lies and love sin because they hate God. As John puts it, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” (John 3:19-21).

Romans 2

2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Chapter one showed us the utter immorality of man but chapter two will now shows us God's patience and man's need of the Gospel. Who is this "you" spoken of? First of all, it fits all those who are hypocritically judging others for their sins when they, too, sin. Jesus said in Matthew, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye" (Matt 7:3)?

It is interesting that Paul just finished saying in chapter one that people were so wicked that they even approved of those who were sinning. Now, he says they are judging people for sin. The point Paul is making is that if you look at the list of sins given in chapter one, everybody will fall into at least one of those categories. Perhaps you aren't consistently faithless, heartless and ruthless, yet at times you may be. Remember, one sin makes you a sinner. Therefore, all are guilty and will have no excuse when they meet their Maker. This is what the law does. Even the best of men are condemned to hell. Paul will clarify this later in chapter three when he says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that *every mouth may be silenced* and the *whole world* held accountable to God" (Rom 3:19-20). Therefore, if you think you are pretty pious in your deeds, think again. Only through Christ's blood is one made righteous.

It is also clear that we must be careful about judging others because of their poor deeds since we are in the same position. Again, Paul clarifies in later chapters, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom 14:3-4). There are many Christians who have weaknesses in the flesh that God is sanctifying. There are also many ungodly who will some day be brought to faith. Who are we to judge because how can we judge? God told Samuel, "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). Do not take this as saying we are not to judge sin as that is not what Paul is saying. We are not to pass judgment on salvation, but we are on sins.

Verse two states that we can know (because it has been written in the Holy Scriptures) that God's judgment against sinners is based on pure truth and righteousness. Man's judgment is based on limited knowledge without knowing the heart or even our own motives in judging. Therefore, if we judge the salvation of someone else we are taking the place and role of God Himself and denying God's kindness and tolerance, of which man doesn't fully understand in the flesh.

Verse four makes it clear that judging someone's salvation is taking credit away from God and Christ Jesus. We show contempt for the amazing grace of Christ Jesus, a

kindness far beyond what we understand. We also show disgust and disagreement with God being patient toward sinners and fall into the same trap that Jonah did. Jonah did not want God to be patient with the enemies of Israel so God gave him an illustration with a vine that grew to shade him, but died soon after. What was God's message to Jonah? "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" 'I do,' he said. 'I am angry enough to die.' But the LORD said, 'You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city'" (Jonah 4:9-11)? God's love is deeper than men can understand. Parents are patient with their children because they love them, likewise, God is patient with us. Peter writes, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). We read in Ezekiel, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek 18:23)? Thank you Jesus for your patience.

Paul is telling us here in Romans what God told Jonah. It is God's kindness that leads people to repentance. What a powerful statement! We think that if we beat sinners over the head with the law that eventually they will repent. I'm not saying the law is not given, even Jonah went and preached repentance to the Ninevites, however, he obviously also told them of God's kindness in His mercy and grace towards those who repent. The law alone will not bring anyone to salvation. The Gospel of God's grace must also be given to show people the extent of God's kindness. God allures people to Him, not forcefully making them believe. This is what free will is all about. Giving God an opportunity to show His kindness and love. God said of Israel, "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her" (Hos 2:14). He also says, "I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hos 11:4). Jeremiah said, "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness'" (Jer 31:3). That is the love and grace God is alluring us with as well.

In a narrower sense, the above verses are probably referring to the Jews that Paul is actually writing to. Therefore, Paul is telling the Jews not to judge the Gentiles for their sins because the Jews were guilty as well. Chapter one focused on the ungodliness of the Gentiles, but now he says, "you therefore" meaning the Jews. The same sins the Jews looked down on the Gentiles for were being done by the Jews themselves (Mat 3:7; 12:34; 12:39; 12:45). Yet the Jews considered themselves to be God's people, separate from the Gentiles and thus receive special treatment. Jesus even said, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt 3:9-10). Yet if the Gentiles had the testimony of God's creation and were "without excuse," how much more the Jews who had the very presence of God among them.

It was difficult for the Jew to grasp that God would extend His covenant promise, that was given for them, also to the Gentiles. Paul now instructs them that it is God's kindness and patience that has brought about this gift for the Gentile. The same was true with Jonah who could not understand why the Gentiles in Ninevah would be offered

God's mercy. Ironically, the tables seem to have turned in our society and it is important for today's Gentiles to realize the same patience and kindness is true for today's Jews. More of this will be discussed as we go through later chapters that I believe will be very challenging for many readers.

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.

Again, the primary audience is the Jew who had been looking down upon the Gentile, yet the message fits anyone who is denying God and willfully practicing sin. It wasn't God that initiated the sin and rebellion, but the people themselves who continued to deny God's Word until God gave them over to the natural selves. They were stubborn and unrepentant and thus the many sins they commit are not being covered by sacrifice in the Old Testament or Christ in the New Testament. If the sins aren't atoned for, they pile up to the heavens. This is reiterated in Thessalonians, "They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last" (1 Thess 2:15-16). If only they would admit as Ezra said, "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to You, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6).

What are the sins being stored up for? God's wrath that will be revealed when He returns. The more sins, the more wrath you receive. At times one may wonder why in the present world that it seems the wicked prosper, yet here it says they are storing up wrath for the day of judgment. Is it wicked to prosper? No, but if the cares of this world keep us distracted from God, they become a source of evil. Jeremiah asked this same question, "Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease" (Jer 12:1)? God's answer is ultimately, "If any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it" (Jer 12:17). Their punishment is yet in part, future. I believe it was a brother in Christ, Paul Washer, who said the reason God allows the wicked to prosper is the same reason a farmer fattens up a hog before the day of slaughter. These men are storing up wrath for the dreadful day of destruction.

Another thing to consider is that many people do not understand that there are different degrees of heaven and hell. Yes, God does keep track of the good deeds of the godly and the sins of the ungodly, however, there is no record for the believers' sins. We read in Luke, "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with *many blows*. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with *few blows*. From

everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:47-48).

Scripture also supports the fact that there are different glories or degrees of heaven. As an analogy, if one person is represented by a 16 ounce cup and another person is represented by a 32 ounce cup, both will be filled with as much glory as they can hold when they get to heaven. The sixteen ounce cup would not desire more because he cannot hold any more. He is as full as he knows how to be. Those who love God enough to stand firm in these last days will indeed be blessed because of their perseverance and love for God. One must be careful to realize this is NOT works righteousness. Good works will not get you to a higher glory in heaven, but your faith will. The more you love God the more you see Him. The more faith you have, the more you will produce good fruit in keeping with repentance (Mat 3:8). James warns, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! *Even the demons believe that*--and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (James 2:18-22). Clearly we must be careful about having faith in faith. Believing in Jesus does not get you to heaven, because even Satan believes in Jesus. Allowing Jesus to be your personal Savior whom you love, adore and follow daily because of your faith in Him; that is our free ticket to heaven. Again, James writes, “You see that a person is justified by what he does and *not* by faith alone” (James 2:24). It will take great faith that will be blessed, to do what the saints in Revelation 12 do: They, “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Rev 12:11).

It is equally important, however, to make sure one does not put faith in their deeds as their means of salvation. Titus wrote, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy” (Titus 3:5).). All those who have faith in Jesus will have their sins covered up rather than stored up. Even Job realized this, “My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin” (Job 14:17).

Let us look at a few Scripture verses showing us degrees of heaven:

- “The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and *each will be rewarded according to his own labor*. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because **the Day** will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*” (1 Cor 3:8-15).

- “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who *is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*” (Mat 11:11).
- “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called **least in the kingdom of heaven**, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called **great in the kingdom of heaven**” (Mat 5:19).
- “The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, *take charge of ten cities.*’ The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ His master answered, ‘*You take charge of five cities*’” (Luke 19:16-19).
- Speaking symbolically of the wedding banquet of the Lamb: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, . . . But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests” (Luke 14:8-10).
- “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

Blessed indeed, will be those who suffer for Christ!

Verse five continues to tell us that it is God’s righteous judgment that is revealed. It isn’t God being unjust in pouring out His wrath, it is man deserving his just punishment because he was too stubborn to allow Jesus to take those sins. Also, the wrath will all be directed toward each individual as you are storing up wrath “against yourself.” Each person will be held accountable for his own sin. The same idea is conveyed in verse six where each person will receive punishment in the amount “according” to his sins. Some will receive many blows and others few blows. Either one, however, will be in utter hell. One can read Revelation 6 and see some of the wrath that will be poured out upon these people.

Also in verse six when God says, “according to what he has done” this does not only apply to the outward action but the inner heart and motive. We read in Proverbs, “If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay each person according to what he has done” (Prov 24:12)? Also, “All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Prov 21:2).

Verse seven makes sure the reader understands that there is a distinction between the godly and ungodly. To those who are persistent (doesn’t mean perfect in themselves) in good works and who seek God’s glory and honor along with eternal life with Him, God will grant what they seek. One must remember that persistence is not only patience in length, but also among trials. Jesus said, “All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt 10:22-23). In Hebrews we read, “But My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him” (Heb 10:38). Let us be persistent in doing good.

Jesus explained how we can be persistent, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went

and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matt 13:44-46). In Proverbs we read of God’s wisdom, “If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Prov 2:4-5).

The kingdom of heaven is to be sought after. Likewise, the aspect of our good deeds coming from faith is seen peppered throughout the entire Bible but a few verses should suffice.

- “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Tim 6:18-19).
- “When Jesus heard this, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me” (Luke 18:22).
- “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless” (James 2:20).
- “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:20).
- “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God” (1 Tim 2:9-10).

In verse eight we see that the opposite of those who are rewarded with eternal life for seeking the kingdom of God. It is those who are punished because they seek after things of selfish benefit and reject Christ (Truth) only to follow Satan (evil). Not only will they receive God’s wrath which is incomprehensible for us right now, but they will also experience great anger, both God’s righteous anger and their own unrighteous anger towards God. We read many places in the Bible about God’s righteous anger. God said of the rebellious Israelites, “So I declared on oath in My anger, ‘They shall never enter My rest” (Heb 4:3).

In addition to the wrath and anger, there will be trouble and distress. The wrath and anger of verse eight is primarily focused on God’s anger and wrath towards man, but the trouble and distress here is focused on the torment of man’s own mind. Distress of one’s mind is yet another terrible thing to go through. When one is troubled, he is fearful and uneasy and can find no rest or peace. It is the trouble and distress that eats you up on the inside.

Just as the Gospel was given first for the Jew and then for the Gentile, so too, punishment will be dealt out first for the Jew because they were the first to reject it. Even in the Garden of Eden we see that after the fall everyone was punished in their proper order. Satan received the curse first because he deceived Eve. Eve received her curse next because she was the first to eat of the fruit and then tempt Adam. Adam was last because he sinned last.

On the other hand those who accept the Gospel of Christ are rewarded in the same order in which it was offered. Clearly Jesus tells us it was offered to the Jew first, “I was

sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 15:24). Often people confuse the privilege of God’s calling or vocation with salvation. The Jews were clearly called to a special vocation, one main part being to be a blessing to the nations around them as God told Abraham when giving him the covenant, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). It is through the Jew that the Gentile was welcomed into the blessing of salvation, not vice-versa. Though in their calling the Jews have a special place when it comes to salvation Christ says, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col 3:11). Because of their special calling, however, the Jew will receive the first blessing. Again, at first it might seem that God does show favoritism because the Jew receives the glory, peace and honor before the Gentile, however, this is only just and right since it was God’s covenant to the Jew. The Gentile is welcomed into that Jewish covenant and receives the same favor and rights. There is a difference between showing favorites and following rules and promises. God is simply living by the Law He made to reflect who He is, “Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike” (Deut 1:17), and “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes” (Deut 10:17). Therefore, no man will go to hell because his sins did not send him there and he did not have an opportunity to have his sins covered by the blood of Jesus, nor will any man go to heaven without having faith in Jesus because in God there is no favoritism, only justice.

The opposite of the wrath received by the ungodly is the glory and honor given to us by Christ. Instead of anger, trouble and distress we receive peace. These gifts alone are beyond my imagination. The thought of the living God who created the universe giving honor and glory to me is beyond words.

12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. 14(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Verse 12 is following the theme of the previous verse where it is explained that God does not show favoritism. A Gentile who sins, even though he is apart from the law is still going to perish because he has sinned. No sin can enter the kingdom of God and thus all sin must be removed by Jesus, whether you have the written law or not. This is why he will explain in verse 15 that even though the written law isn’t there to condemn you, the law on your hearts is. Likewise, the Jew who sins under the written law will be judged by that law and will perish as well. Both Jew and Gentile are guilty as sin.

Verse 13 continues to explain that even though both the Jews and Gentiles had heard the law, it doesn’t matter if you don’t act on what you hear. It is also implied that those that do obey God’s law will be declared “righteous in God’s sight.” Do you know anybody doing that? Probably not. Nobody, in the flesh can fully obey God’s law. This is

why Jesus is not just nice, but necessary. We read in Galatians that we now have a new law to follow, “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1-2). What is the law of Christ? Well, if God is love, loving may have something to do with it don't you think? Romans will later declare, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:8-10). With this said, I do not want to give you the impression that the law spoken of in verse thirteen has been taken away and is no longer in effect because it is. Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-19). The law of love, therefore, does not override the written law, it simply explains that these written laws are an expression of love. Thus, if you love God, these will naturally be followed. That still leaves us with the question of how can we obey the law then? You can't, but “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:20-21)! Also, we must remember that, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13). If you no longer live but it is Christ living in you and through you, then He is the one who obeys and fulfills the law in your stead. Therefore, one must have faith in Jesus to obey the law. Those that have that are viewed as saints in God's sight, regardless of what you see yourself as.

Verses 14 and 15 continue to clarify that the Gentiles didn't have the written law, but by the very thing God put in the hearts by nature, many obeyed much of the law. While God gave the law to the Jews on stone, He gave it to the Gentile on his heart. Their hearts were just like having the written commandments so they were a “law for themselves.” Again, because man has a conscience, he is condemned for ignoring it. The very word conscience is “con” meaning “with,” and “science,” meaning “knowledge,” shows that man sins “with knowledge” that it is wrong. There were many Gentiles that knew God apart from following the Jews and their law. Rahab, Ruth and many others had their hearts, consciences and even creation, testifying about God. They would have been without excuse to deny God or His law. One's conscience can accuse him or defend him, depending on whether you listen to it or not. The same is true today. God is constantly drawing us with the law that is within our hearts and asking us to, “Demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive *every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete” (2 Cor 10:5-6). Praise God for making our obedience complete through Christ. We must also remember that conscience or not, the entire law must be kept perfectly for salvation, thus the point is that the Law can not save you because the Gentiles and Jews had it, but neither could keep it. Thank you Jesus for keeping it for us!

Another point in verse 14 is that the Gentiles were obeying the Law by their “nature.” Some find this a contradiction to Ephesians which tells us, “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Eph 2:3). How can we be objects of wrath by nature, yet have the law of God on our hearts by nature? Simply put, we have two sides, the flesh and the spirit. In chapter seven we read that God had condemned the sin in man, “In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Rom 8:4-5). We have two natures. One is in the flesh wherein sin lives and reigns. The other is the spirit, in which God has written the law and given us a conscience. We must choose to serve in the spirit, not in the flesh. This is why Jesus said, “The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Peter also wrote, “Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the *divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Verse 16 tells us that what we have just been talking about will all take place on judgment day. It is then that the conscience of those who sinned apart from the law will indeed bear witness, for them, or against them. All those who had the law, will be judged by that law. Either way, it is the law that will condemn you and Christ that will save you.

Even the deepest secrets and motives of the heart will be exposed when Jesus judges the world. We read in the Old Testament, “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl 12:14). Also, in the New Testament, “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Cor 4:5).

For many, the words, “as the Gospel declares” seems out of place here in talking about judgment. Yet we must remember that Jesus is the Lion to some and the Lamb to others. It is the Gospel that declares us innocent of breaking the law and the Gospel that declares us guilty of it. Timothy wrote, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1). People often view Jesus as the “nice” side of God, yet the Scriptures clearly show Him as a lion who will judge sin (Acts 17:31; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5; John 5:22,27; 1 Thess 4:16-18; Matt 25:31-46). His Gospel declares it. Part of the Gospel is that no sin will enter heaven. When people say that “their God is a God of love and he wouldn’t send people to hell,” I agree with them because their god doesn’t exist. However, the God of the Bible has to punish sin because He is loving and just. What kind of loving judge would allow a rapist who raped your mother to go free in the civil courts today? That would be unjust and unloving. This is why love is just and the Gospel judges.

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a

teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth- 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 24 As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

As Paul speaks to the Jew who has been relying on the law and bragging about the fact that they have a special relationship with God, he is about to show them that what they took pride in, actually condemned them. Many of the Jews believed that they knew the will of God because they knew the law of God, therefore, they approved of superior things like the Sabbath, which the Gentiles did not honor. Some, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, even considered themselves so superior that they saw themselves as teachers worthy of discipling others who didn't "see" what they saw in the holy Scriptures. Being called a "Jew" was a great honor in which they took pride. This is expressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians, "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:15-16). John the Baptist's words reflect their piety in descent as well, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. God warned them of this sin way back in the Old Testament, but they did not learn their lesson: "On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill" (Zeph 3:11). Today, the Gentiles would do well to learn from the mistake of the Pharisees.

In some ways the Jew did have some "bragging rights" when it came to the study of the law. It is also true that God had revealed things to the Jews that He had not given to other nations, which is why we read, "He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation, they do not know His laws" (Ps 147:19-20). The problem is the Jews boasted in this fact rather than humbly giving thanks for it. It is a good thing to boast about God and His relationship with us, but not about our relationship to Him. We read in Corinthians, "Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'" (1 Cor 1:31).

The background of the Jewish education did give worldly reason as to why the Jews could consider themselves so superior when it came to their relationship to God through the law. A good Jew wore a prayer shawl with tassels. The edge of this shawl was called the canaph and the fringes were called the tzit-tzit. The tzit-tzit had five knots for the five books of Moses with each one having a blue strand to remind them of the commandments. The Jews took their training so seriously that it was quite strict. As a child, the first stage of learning was called Bet Sefer (House of the Book), which took place from six years old to the age of ten. In this first stage you would memorize the first five books of the Old Testament.

The second stage was from ages 10-14 and it was called Bet Talmud. Only the best of the best continued to memorize the rest of the Old Testament. The Rabi would give oral exams much different than what we are used to. Here in our culture we ask what is 2 + 2 and student say 4. In the Jewish culture the answer was given by saying "what is 16 divided by 4?" The child had to respond with a question to teach them how to process

and think through the issues. Doing this allowed them to interact with the Scriptures. When Jesus was 12 years old He was in the temple and the Pharisees were amazed with His “questions and answers.” Probably because He was in Bet Talmud.

The third stage of schooling was called Bet Midrash (14ish). The best of the best of the best went here where each had their own interpretation of the Torah. One might say this passage means these three things and others would add two more while another would agree in part with one but disagree with another. At this stage some would permit and forbid or bind and lose people to do or not do things. The rabbis interpretation was called his “yolk.” When you followed a rabbi you took his yolk upon you (which is why Jesus said His yolk was easy). The Rabbi wanted to perpetuate his yolk so he would look for disciples who would take his yolk to the most people. If the rabbi thought that this student had what it took to be like him and do what he did, he would say “come follow me.” After this, the student left everything to follow his rabbi throughout the day and do everything he did. If the rabbi would miss a step when walking, the student would do the same. It was this kind of strict training that caused them to feel so superior. It is easy to see why they would feel that they were instructors to the blind (ignorant) and foolish because they had put their faith in knowledge and men, not the actual Word of God.

Verse 21 tells us they were a teacher of infants. The Greek indeed implies an instruction of children and thus they took pride in what we just looked at in educating their youth. However, instead of leading the blind, they themselves were blind guides as Jesus said, “Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matt 15:14, also 23:16). He also warned them, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matt 23:15). Likewise, Gentiles were referred to as those in the dark, “The people living in darkness have seen a great light” (Matt 4:16). However, rather than being a guide to those Gentiles in the dark, they remained in darkness themselves, rejecting their Messiah, “In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:4-5).

Verse 21 shows the Jews had what they believed was the “embodiment of knowledge.” The problem was that the knowledge of that law was an object of the truth it pointed to, God and His Son, Jesus. In a very real sense they became those that Timothy warned of who were, “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim 3:5).

As verse 21 says, they teach others, but they would not teach themselves because the very commandments they learned in their schooling were being broken due to all the new “yolk” and ideas about the commandments. Even though the law said not to steal, they were stealing from the elderly by not taking care of them and using the money for the Temple. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (Mark 7:11-13). Jesus also warned them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers” (Matt 23:14).

Verse 22 shows that people are not to commit adultery, yet the Jews were guilty of this sin as well. The Talmud and Josephus even list names of rabbis who were guilty of

adultery. Even more so, they were committing the worst of adultery and breaking their union with God. In the Old Testament God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel saying, “She gave herself as a prostitute to all the elite of the Assyrians and defiled herself with all the idols of everyone she lusted after” (Ezek 23:7-8). Jeremiah recorded, “Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve You!’ Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute” (Jer 2:20). There are many more examples but this shows that the Pharisees too, had been worshipping themselves more than God since, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). In a similar way, the Jews also believed they abhorred idols,, yet they idolized the money in their temples. Money was the idol that many of these Jews prostituted themselves to. When Jesus cleared the Temple He said, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a ‘den of robbers’” (Matt 21:13). Another way they robbed temples was by robbing God Himself, “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings” (Mal 3:8). Even in the Pslams God spoke, “When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers” (Ps 50:18).

Verse 23 continues along the same theme in that the Jews bragged about the law even though they broke it continually, dishonoring God. One should not boast in what he does not completely agree with. It is no honor and glory to simply say something, rather to act it out gives one reason to boast. The funny thing is that there are many Gentiles today who think the same thing. When I evangelize I see that most people think they will get to heaven because they are “good” people. However, when you really look closely at the Ten Commandments, they see that they aren’t so good after all. You tell one lie you are a liar and have broken a commandment. You take a cookie out of the cookies jar when your mother told you not to, you broke another commandment as you became a thief. You ever look with lust upon a woman? According to Jesus in Matthew 5 you just became an adulterer, breaking another commandment. We could go on and on, yet this is the same idea of what the Jews were doing; justifying themselves by their works (which weren’t that good anyway), rather than by faith. This will be illustrated later in Romans. The result of such “good works” that the Gentiles could see right through, was that the Gentiles saw these Jews as hypocrites and blasphemed the God of the Jews just as it was written, “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone’” (Ezek 36:22-23). The same goes on today in a reverse manner. Today, many Gentile “Christians” view themselves as “good” yet the world sees them watching the same ungodly movies, listening to the same ungodly music, telling the same ungodly jokes and hanging around in the same ungodly places. No wonder God’s name is blasphemed in our society today. As bondservants of Christ we should listen to God’s Word through Timothy, “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed” (1 Tim 6:1).

25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26 If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they

were circumcised? 27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

One of the most “prized” doctrines for the Jew was circumcision. The problem is circumcision was a command of the Scriptures. Paul makes the point that it is valuable, if you observe the law. However, if you break the law, your obedience to circumcision is ineffective. Why? James explains, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker” (James 2:10-11). Therefore, you “become as though you had not been circumcised” when you break any part of the law.

Many denominations could learn from this as well. Almost every denomination has a “prized” doctrine other than the real prize of Jesus. For some it is baptism, others have the speaking in tongues, some the day of worship and still others have it as the style of worship, however, though all are important, they pale in importance when compared to the Gospel. “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor 9:24-25). That prize is Christ and none other shall take His place. Galatians explains, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, *you who attempt to be justified by law*; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of *righteousness by faith*. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Gal 5:1-6). Therefore, whatever prized doctrine you may have, one must remember, it is nothing if you have made this doctrine a yoke of bondage. We must rely purely on faith.

Verse 26 refers back to the Gentiles who had not undergone circumcision, yet because of the moral law written in their hearts, kept the law (as much as can be in the flesh). It seems as if there is a contradiction here because first he tells us that if you break one law you break all of them, including the law of circumcision. Then he says that if you keep all the other laws, but not the law of circumcision, you will be considered as having kept the law of circumcision. There is no contradiction here, but how can this be?

We must remember what circumcision was given for. It was a sign of the covenant made with Abraham back in Genesis 15 and 17. In other words, to be considered circumcised meant that you were considered as one welcomed into the covenant given to Abraham. The point Paul is making is that faith in obedience to the law can't save you, rather faith in Christ does. When one has faith in Jesus, His obedience to the law now becomes yours and thus you can obey the law perfectly through Him only. Therefore, those who obey the law out of knowledge and love of their Creator and Savior

will be considered righteous and one of the circumcised children of God. As the New Testament explains, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col 2:9-12). Clearly, the circumcision discussed here, can only be accomplished by God. We read in Ephesians, "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and *strangers from the covenants of promise*, having no hope and without God in the world. *But now in Christ Jesus* you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:11-13).

Verse 27 continues on the same theme saying that the Gentiles will condemn the Jews who had the personal instructions and covenant of God because they took the gift for granted and disobeyed the commands.

In verse 28 he begins to finish the explanation. Many had considered that being a Jew is what saved you. They missed the point that it was being under the covenant that saved you. It is true that the covenant was given to the Jew, but those who rejected it would not see God's rest as we read in Hebrews, "And again in the passage above He says, 'They shall never enter My rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts'" (Heb 4:5-7). Yet at the same time, even in the Old Testament there were many Gentiles (Ruth, Rahab) who were welcomed into the covenant by their faith in God causing them to obey the covenant rules. We read in Ezekiel, "You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the *aliens who have settled among you* and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel" (Eze 47:21-22). Also in Exodus, "An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you" (Ex 12:48-49). Therefore, being a Jew wasn't just a physical thing, but rather a heart and covenant thing. Jesus declared that a true Jew obeys God, "'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do the things Abraham did'" (John 8:39-40). Remember, Abraham was considered righteous before he was circumcised.

Verse 29 continues with the fact that a Jew is one who obeys, regardless of parentage. Likewise, circumcision was of the cutting of the sinful fleshly desires away from the heart. Only the Spirit of God, who works faith in people, could do just a thing. Keep in mind that this concept of a circumcised heart is not just a New Testament idea, but an Old Testament promise that the Jews were well aware of. "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut 10:16; see also Deut 10:16, Jer 4:4, Ezek 44:7). The law could only tell you what to do, the Spirit must circumcise the

heart to move you to do it. Therefore, when one obeys God out of love for Him in the heart, God cleanses us from all filthy unrighteousness and He gets all the credit. We read, “If *we confess* our sins, *He* is faithful and just and *will forgive us our sins* and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim *we* have not sinned, *we* make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives” (1 John 1:9-10). In other words, man will sin, but through faith in Jesus those sins are forgiven and we are, therefore, righteous. Paul will later quote Psalm 32 saying, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom 4:8). Therefore, man has no place to brag about their relationship to God, rather one can only brag about God’s relationship with us.

Keep in mind that this does not mean that the Jews who believed and obeyed were no different than Gentiles who believed. It is the Jewish covenant that the Gentile is simply welcomed into. As we discussed earlier at the beginning of Romans, many “Gentiles” may actually be part of the Jewish “lost sheep of Israel.” Others like Ruth and Rahab were welcomed into the same covenant by their faith and considered Jews even though they had no Jewish blood. Both receive the same reward, but their calling and vocation is different. We will address this in later chapters.

Romans 3

3:1 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. 3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

As I said at the end of chapter two, though doctrines may be important, when they become a legalistic tool of bondage and works righteousness, they mean nothing. However, when used in their right context they are "valuable in every way." A natural question is raised in chapter two. If a pagan can be viewed as circumcised even though he doesn't have the law, why then does it matter if one is a Jew? Verse one asks "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way" (Rom 3:1-2). So what is the value of these doctrines? To promote holiness and happiness in one's heart, not just the act of doing the doctrine. "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Of course, obedience to these doctrines doesn't make you holy, rather it points to the One who does. Also, just because your parents were Christians or "Jews", doesn't mean you are because your genealogy doesn't save you either. I believe that many people have great knowledge of the Scriptures (just as the Jews did) and because of this knowledge believe they are saved. This, too, is not holiness of the Spirit but pride of the flesh. As Jesus told the Pharisees, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life" (John 5:39-40).

Verse two states that there still is value in being a Jew. Many today believe that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile citing Galatians 3:28. In some ways this is true, yet in other ways it is false doctrine and ignores much of the book of Romans as we will continue to see. As said in chapter two, there is no difference when it comes to salvation and the gift of God's grace and mercy, however, when it comes to their calling and vocation, the Jews have favor with God. One of the greatest advantages it says in verse two is that the Jew has been entrusted with the Holy Scriptures. It was to the Jew that God divinely spoke and entrusted His Word to be passed on to the nations. The Old Testament was even written primarily in their language. Indeed, we should be thankful that the Jews have done such a good job in preserving the Word (with God's divine help) throughout the generations. Jesus also told the Gentile woman at the well, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22-23). Should we not, therefore, treat the Jew with more respect for their faithfulness to their vocation and yet even more concern for their rejection of Christ?

We must also remember that as we read through the prophetic book of Revelation we see the Jew as a central figure. The New Jerusalem will have twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes written on them. Which one will you go through? Apparently, we will be assigned a tribe, just as Ruth and Rahab were. In any case, the words, "much

in every way” indicate that the twelve tribes will be lifted up in this advantageous way for an eternity. More of these advantages will be discussed in chapter nine.

Verse three asks the question that is being lived out by most Gentiles today. If the Jews did not have faith in God doesn't that make them ineligible for their vocation? Absolutely not! God uses ungodly men like Pharaoh for His purposes, as we will discuss in later chapters. Likewise, regardless of their acceptance of the covenant, God is faithful because it is His promise to them, not their promise to Him. We must remember that a main aspect of the covenant was that all nations would be blessed through them (Gen 15). Because Christ came for the Jew and then went to the Gentile as the Jews rejected the Gospel, all nations have been blessed through their disobedience. As part of their vocation was having the Word of God entrusted to them, they were used mightily by God, as no other nation has ever been so faithful in preserving and respecting the written Word. The Jews realized, “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to Him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today” (Deut 4:7-8)?

Does their lack of faith mean the Jews are not saved? After all, chapter two just outlined the great sinfulness of the Jews. If they reject Jesus as their Messiah, there is no way into heaven because, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). God is faithful to His covenant but yet we must accept it as He said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep” (Gen 17:9-10). Another concept we must remember, however, is that God is also speaking here to nations, not individuals. This, too, will be discussed in later chapters, but for now just realize that not every single Jew will be saved, but as a nation, they will be. The Scriptures promise that in the end times the Jew will see that Christ was the Messiah and will repent (Hosea 6:1-3, Rom 11:25-26, John 19:37). Yet another aspect of this was discussed in chapter one in that many of the Gentiles are the lost sheep of Israel that had been scattered among other nations and assimilated into them. As was prophesied in Genesis, Ephraim would become a multitude of Gentiles (Gen 48:19). As the Scriptures clearly point out, Ephraim became known as the Northern kingdom and the “lost ten tribes.” Therefore, to say that the Jewish nation will not be saved is to say that God failed in His promises.

I feel it necessary to point out a lie that has been “lived out” by most of our early church fathers in regard to the Jew. It seems that these verses (and others we will discuss later) have been ignored and have thus contaminated our view and compassion toward the Jew today. There is a common doctrine called, “replacement theology” that states that the church has replaced the Jew. Nothing could be further from the Scriptures. As we will read in later chapters, the Gentile has simply been welcomed in, or “grafted into” the Jewish covenant. This may seem like a small difference, but the outcome of such believe has been devastating to the Gospel, especially when offered to the Jew. Because of the teachings of many early church fathers, today, the view of the Jew is often contempt and hatred. After all, they killed Jesus didn't they? No, Jesus said, “The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life-only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up

again” (John 10:16-18). Remember, it was all of our sins that Christ died for. This may seem off topic, but I believe it fits in well as we look at the big picture.

In extra-Biblical writings James becomes very popular and is well known. He becomes the leader of the zealots and is killed. Simon (cousin of Yeshua) takes over the position and leads the Nazarenes (Messianic Jews) out of Jerusalem to the fortified city of Pella when the Romans come in 70 A.D. James would have been the *Nasi* or ruler of the Messianic church around the time of the Book of Acts. In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas were arguing and when everyone is finished, James speaks up in verse 19 and makes a final ruling. This is how the Jewish Sanhedrin worked as well. Interestingly, James was the brother of Jesus and a descendant of David, just like the *Nasi* (head of the Jewish synagogue) would have been. The early church was set up in much the same Jewish way. For example, the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) was comprised of the apostles and elders who would make rulings and send letters out to the community (Both oral and written, just like the Sanhedrin did).

In Acts 13:13-48 we read, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, [high concentration of Jews here] and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. . . Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “*Men of Israel, and you who fear God*, listen. . . When the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy. . . Now when the congregation had broken up, many of *the Jews* and *devout proselytes* followed Paul. . . Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” WHY WERE THEY GLAD? We see three groups of people discussed here, Jews, Gentile God-Fearers, and Proselytes. The Gentiles were permitted in the Synagogue but they were not considered first class citizens and, therefore, they didn’t have the same rights. They weren’t Proselytes who went through all the rigmarole to become “Jewish.” This is why in verse 48 it shows that the Gentiles were “glad” because they become co-heirs, or first class citizens. This arrogance was causing a great division among the church. There was another problem in Paul doing this as well. The Jews were considered to be atheists by the Romans but they were still allowed to have a certain status within their borders because there were so many of them. When the Gentiles participated in the synagogue they had to pay the temple tax etc. This meant more money for the Temple, however, when Paul preached and made them co-heirs they would no longer have to pay the money. This fact also began to allow Gentiles to be freed from some of the Jewish community rules. The result was increased persecution of the Jews by the Romans, which in turn, made the attachment to the Jewish community less attractive to the Gentile.

A response to this growing trend was the *Birkhat Haminim* (curse against the Heretics). This was a prayer added by the rabbis in the early 90’s to remove anyone that didn’t follow their version of the Jewish faith. Particularly the Nazarenes (Jewish Christians). Jewish believers were being kicked out of their communities (Possible that the Book of Hebrews may have been written to these people to hang in there). Nonetheless, in the 90’s the Gospel was spreading rapidly but it was mostly the Gentiles since they were the majority of the population plus they were responding favorably whereas the Jews weren’t. This, too, brought about a growing split between Jews and Gentiles. This fact is seen clearly in Acts when Paul goes to the synagogues. As the Gentile numbers grew, they began to “boast over the branches” and found themselves to

be better than the Jewish believers. The Gentiles began forming their own little group or sect, leaving the Nazarenes by themselves, being rejected by both the non-believing Jews and the believing Gentiles.

By the 100's this attitude is seen in the early church writings. Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch or Northern Syria today) wrote a letter to one of the churches in the area about 107 AD. This is what he said: "If we conform to Judaism, then we have not received grace." He urged them not to do the Sabbath even though this was one of the ten commandments. He also said, "It is absurd to have Jesus Christ on the lips and at the same time to live like a Jew. No, Christianity didn't believe in Judaism but Judaism believed in Christianity. And in its bosom was assembled everyone professing faith in God." (I would agree that Christians should not be legalistically following the law, but Christ didn't get rid of that law, we were to follow it in our hearts. Circumcision has value, when it is the heart that is circumcised. Nonetheless, even here by 107 A.D. the idea was coming out that you could not be a Jew and Christian because of these conflicts. Therefore, a Jew that wanted to honor the Sabbath from his heart was being removed out of the Christian community.

Ignatius was not alone. There is the epistle of Barnabas which is a pseudepigraphical book that was written between 96-98 AD. It was written for the Jews who believed in the Messiah. Here is what it said: "The Jews lost their covenant forever when Moses destroyed the Tablets on Mount Sinai. *Jesus is for the Gentiles who are the true recipients of God's covenant.* Not the Jews. The keeping of the *New Moons are abolished*, as well as other Jewish law. There is only one Law, the Law of Jesus Christ." Didn't Christ say He did not come to abolish but to fulfill the law? Aren't the Jews the true recipients of the covenant and the Gentiles the ones welcomed into it?

Even Justin Martyr (1st of early church fathers 130's -140's) fell into a trap of removing the focus of the Old Testament. Justin wrote two major theological treatises called the 1st and 2nd apologies. He was writing among a world with three competing philosophies, Greek pagan philosophy, Jews, and Christianity. What he did to combat this was to build a doctrine stating what we should believe and why. It was very lengthy but it had 4 main pivotal events in history for his theology that are still accepted today as the basis of our faith. They were as follows:

- 1) Creation: Genesis 1-2.
- 2) Fall: Man introduces his own will. Genesis 3.
- 3) Redemption in Christ: Restore human condition from the Fall. Matthew.
- 4) Consummation through Christ's return. Revelation

The problem with this is that it eliminates most of the Bible and Israel and, thus, leads to replacement theology where God has *replaced* Israel with the Gentile church. But where is the covenant God made to Abraham? Virtually, the entire Bible traces this covenant to and through Christ, yet Justin left all of this out. In fact, there is a record of a letter written by Justin to a Jew named Trypho. It is unclear if this really happened but supposedly he was in Ephesus waiting to board a ship when some Jews came as they were fleeing from the Bar Kokbah revolt. Justin met Trypho and got into a debate with him over the Messiah. In the letter he gives three significant aspects of the *rest of the Scriptures*: 1) Prophecies pointing to Christ 2) Scripture points to universal moral code

for every believer 3) The remainder was written to the Jews which is no longer useful. Justin said that the God of Israel is among the church rather than the Jews. He also said that the Church was the climax and purpose of creation and, therefore, God's relationship with the Jews had now ended and the spiritual relationship with church had begun. He went on to go as far as saying, "God instituted circumcision so you and you only might suffer the infliction due those who crucified Christ. Since circumcision of the flesh is the mark you can be distinguished from other men" (Bible says this was a sign of the covenant so Martyr is wrong). In the end, Justin helped bring the institution of Christianity into something totally separate from the Jewish World. From Justin things began to spiral downward. Antisemitic *ideas* were introduced, discussed, and adopted, which then led to antisemitic action and behavior.

Other problems arose as well as the early church was dealing with a series of heresies. One was Gnosticism which said there was a material world and a spiritual one, but the spiritual world was more valuable and meaningful. This began to invade Christian theology so that a heretical bishop named Marcion (200 A.D.) said that there were two Gods; the Old Testament god and the New Testament god. Marcion said the N.T. god was greater and dealt with the spiritual side of things while the Old Testament god dealt with the materialistic realm. In response to this heresy, two major church fathers responded to Marcion. They attacked this idea of two gods AND the idea of the Jewish nation being rejected. The first was Tertullian (200 A.D.) who said that the God of Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and there is no other. However, he also went on to attack the Jew and explained the differences in the old and new by saying, "The commandments of the Torah are degrading and unworthy of an enlightened people. They were given to the Jews to curb idolatry and greed, which was unique to them, not shared by the rest of the human race. Their trail of crimes culminated in the killing of Christ. Jews were always unworthy of election. Now they have lost it. God's choice is now transferred to the Gentiles who are capable at living at a higher level than the Jews." [Jews were the only monotheistic nation throughout history, yet he calls them unworthy]. The second man to address Marcion was Irenaeus (200 A.D.) He reconciled the two testaments by saying God's history with man was continuous from creation to the end. His purpose hadn't changed since, "God chose the Jews in order to prepare them for Christ but they rejected and murdered him. Because the Jews rejected Jesus God granted their inheritance to Gentiles alone. Jews who boast of being Israel are disinherited from the grace of God. Jews are no longer useful." Again, there is truth in the fact that Jews that reject Jesus can not inherit the kingdom of God and that because of this, the covenant was also offered to the Gentile. However, this does not mean that the Jews were completely rejected as a nation and that they were no longer useful.

As a result of these teachings there is a certain mindset that remains even today. The problem is that just as Judaism was based upon the teachings of the Rabbis, Christianity is now based upon the teachings of the early church fathers. To say Christianity is based on the New Testament is to say Judaism is based on the Old Testament. This is wrong! Judaism is based on the Talmud which filters the Old Testament through it. Christianity is based on the institution of the church fathers with the New Testament being filtered through it. We believe what only what we've been taught to believe.

Things continued to go south as Origen (185-254) was a good Christian man who had erroneous prophetic views that laid the theological foundation for evil men (like Hitler) later. He harmonized the Bible with Plato's philosophy and came up with the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible; especially in areas of prophecy. The result was that the Church leaders didn't see Jews as a distinct people because the Church had replaced them. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica it says, "The church being God's true Israel according to the Spirit, the Jewish people no longer had any vocation or reason to exist" (vol 5, pg 507).

Eusebius wrote soon afterwards his Ecclesiastical History in 300 A.D. It covered history from the time period of the Apostles to 300 AD. This is the authoritative church history used in seminaries today. He commented on Jewish communities that lived in Palestine, Syria, Cyprus and Babylon. He said the Jews had no merit and were a threat to the church. He also went as far as to spread a rumor that at Purim Jews sacrificed Christians in rebellion against Jesus. During this time the Romans were very anti-Semitic as well and also had these kind of crazy stories. This comment by Eusebius and other crazy stories were used to trump up charges against the Jews for later persecution.

Cannons were made saying, "if any clergyman shall enter into a synagogue of Jews or heretics [Nazarenes] to pray let him be deposed, if a laymen does this, let him be excommunicated." Renouncing statements were also written for any Jew who would accept Christ in the 300's. They would say, "I confess and denounce verbally the whole Hebrew people and forthwith declare with a whole heart and sincere faith that he desires to be received among the Christians. He must say the following: 'I renounce all customs rites, legalisms unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrew and all the other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations fasts and new moons and sabbaths and superstitions and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues and food and drink of the Hebrews. In one word I renounce everything Jewish.'" The problem is, many of these things were not Jewish but Biblical. In a similar fashion the Clementine Recognitions in the 300's from the Eastern Church were the same. If a Jew became a Christian he had to say: "I renounce the whole worship of the Hebrews, circumcision, all its legalisms, unleavened bread, Passover, sacrifices of lambs, feast of weeks, trumpets, jubilees, atonement, tabernacles and all other Hebrew feasts, sacrifices prayers, aspersions, purifications expiations fasts sabbath new moons foods and drinks and I absolutely renounce every custom and institution of the Jewish Laws"

This led up to Emperor Constantine who "converted" to Christianity in 313 and made it the official State Religion. To rid Christianity of anything Jewish he:

- 1) Changed the days of the week and months.
- 2) Changed the Sabbath to "Sun" day for Mithras, the sun-god.
- 3) Forbid Jews to keep the festivals and replaced them with Easter and Christmas, formally pagan holidays.

Once Rome became Christian the only people who weren't were the Jews. Again, those that believed in Christ but wanted to continue "circumcision of the heart" were caught between a rock and a hard place. The 325 Council of Nicea focused on Arianism which said Yeshua was not Divine. This was a good thing to address, however, they also

decided Easter would no longer be connected with Passover and said, "For it is unbecoming beyond measure that on this holiest of festivals we should follow the customs of the Jews. Henceforth let us have nothing in common with this odious people."

The father of the Eastern Orthodox Church was John Chrysostom. He was known as the bishop with a golden tongue and was from Constantinople, the most powerful church of this time because it was at the center of the Roman empire. John wrote a series of sermons against Jews and advocated Jewish persecution. He said, "The Jews are the most worthless of all men they are wretches, greedy, rapacious. They are perfidious murders of Christ, they worship the devil their religion is a sickness. The Jews are the odious murderers of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible. No indulgence or pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance and the Jews must live in servitude forever God always hated the Jews. It is incumbent upon all Christians to hate the Jews."

Does this sound like what the Bible advocates, "And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. . . For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins" (Rom 11:17-27). What about Romans chapter nine which says, "The people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Rom 9:4-5). Or, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all" (Rom 3:1-4)!

In any case, Chrysostom was successful. Christian masses began to attack synagogues for the first time. Christians tortured, persecuted and killed Jews as well as burned down their buildings. One of Chrysostom's contemporaries was St Ambrose from Milan Italy. There a synagogue was destroyed under a Christian emperor of Rome. When the next pagan emperor took over (Theodosius) he demanded the synagogue be rebuilt. Ambrose wrote him a letter saying: ""I hereby declare that it was I who set fire to the synagogue. Indeed, I gave the orders for it to be done so that there should no longer be any place where Christ is denied."

St Gregory of Nyssa in the west also wrote about Jews saying, "Assassins of the prophets, companions of devil, a race of vipers, a Sanhedrin of demons, enemies of all

that is beautiful, in their lude grossness.” Ironically, the tables had turned and it seemed that Christians hated the Jews more than other pagan rituals.

St. Augustine (410-420 A.D.) took a slightly different perspective which still was not good, but at least it wasn't as crazy. He was a contemporary of St. Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin. He was extremely anti-Semitic but he simply thought the Jews needed to be left alone as an example of what God did to those who rejected Jesus. This became the prevailing view for the next 500-600 years. Although by this time Jewish rights were already being taken away and they were being excluded from politics.

About a hundred years later, Emperor Justinian (527-565) issued a permanent Christian State Policy which said, “They [Jews] shall enjoy no honors. Their status shall reflect the baseness which in their souls they have elected and desired.” For the next thousand years the Jews continued to be persecuted through various pogroms and inquisitions.

By the 1500's a young German lad named Martin Luther wanted to be lawyer but had an encounter with God and went to the monastery instead. In 1517 he posted the 95 Thesis or condemnations of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg Germany where he challenged the church's primacy, faith by works, priesthood being only for priests and other false doctrines of the Catholic church. Luther was popular and the people rose up to protect him. In the early stages he was very pro-Jewish and formed a mission agency to reach the Jews. He once wrote a tract in 1523 called, “*Jesus was a Jew by birth*” where he challenged the church to recognize who Jesus was. Luther said, “For are fools the Popes, the bishops, the sophists and the monks. These coarse donkey heads have hitherto treated the Jews in such a way that a good Christian could welter into a Jew. And if I were a Jew and saw such stupid rascals as these leading the Christian faith and giving instruction in it, I would sooner be turned into a swine than a Christian.” The Gospel Luther preached to the Jew wasn't accepted any more than the Catholic's accepted the Gospel. As a result, Luther got frustrated and in 1543 before he died, he wrote another tract called, “*On the Jews and their Lies.*” In it he said, “What should we Christians do with that rejected and accursed people the Jews whom we cannot suffer, who are among us. And we know so many of their lies, abusings and curses. I shall offer my faithful suggestion. First, that we burn their synagogues with fire and what cannot be burned will be buried with earth so that no man will ever more be able to see any stone or remnant of it. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom. Secondly, it is necessary to uproot and destroy their houses in the same way. Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings. . . Be taken away from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jew. Since there we find they do the same as in their synagogues or house. . . in order that they may know that they are not lords in our land as they claim but in exile and captivity. Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them, and put aside for safe keeping. . . Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade or a spindle into the hand of young strong Jews and Jewesses. . . Let us therefore use the simple wisdom of other peoples like those of France, Spain and Bohemia and expel them from the land forever. . .” The Encyclopedia Judaica sums it up correctly speaking about this tract, “Short of the Auschwitz oven and extermination, the whole Nazi Holocaust is pre-outlined here.” Is it any wonder that Adolf Hitler cited

Martin Luther in *Mein Kampf* as one of the great heroes of the German people. Also the infamous Nazi war criminal Julius Streicher quoted Luther in his defense at the Nuremburg trials. This is the heritage we have yet many in the church have not yet repented of this travesty. I'm not saying that these men of God did not have great contributions to Christianity. I believe they were used powerfully by God, however, they were sinful men like you and I. They were not perfect, and we must admit that they, too, had faults. However, what will we do with this today? Again, this may have seemed off topic but as you will see, it right on target with the theme of Romans and the distinction between the Jew and Gentile. This information will continue to play a role in the rest of the chapters.

Verse four explains that God is true and faithful, even though men are faithless. We read in Numbers, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind" (Num 23:19). First, if anyone thinks that the Jewish nation will not be saved, he is lying to himself and others. May we not entrust our opinions based upon man's reasoning but rather on God's wisdom, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out" (Rom 11:33).

The second importance of this statement in verse four is that the lying man may take part of God's truthfulness and be proven righteous when judged by God. How can this be? By God being true! As "it was written" quoting Psalm 51:4, we see that man was born sinful and can only be proved right by God's righteousness. In other words, by God's faithfulness to His covenant in sending Christ as a sacrifice to take upon the full wrath of God against sin in our stead. Therefore, only because of Christ can man prevail and be proven right. Not by Christ overlooking our sins, but by our sins being covered and the penalty for them being satisfied. God would be true in judging us, but by His mercy, we will prevail.

Yet a third aspect of God's faithfulness was that it was He who made sure that there was a faithful Jewish line that preserved and followed His Word and covenant. Even in the New Testament there was a faithful remnant. Nicodemus and many other leading Jews believed the Gospel (Acts 17:12). In fact, almost the entire early church prior to Cornelius in Acts 10 were Jews. As we will see later in Romans, God has preserved this remnant even for us today, "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom 11:4-6). As God promised, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him" (Gen 18:18-19).

Still yet another aspect of God's faithfulness must be looked at in reference to the Jewish failure to understand the Word entrusted to them. When Jesus came He was trying to restore the essence of *Biblical* Judaism and spread His message to the end of the earth. His mission was for Israel "I have come to the lost sheep of Israel." (Mat 15). He wanted to help Israel fulfill her mission to be the righteous remnant and bring God to the nations. Just as Christ came to fulfill the law in our stead, He wanted to fulfill Israel's failed mission for her. There is an interesting verse in Matthew 2:15 when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Egypt and then were called back to the Holy Land, "And so was fulfilled

what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” This is a quote from Hosea which reads, “*When Israel was a child*, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1). Note that here in Hosea the son is Israel, not Jesus. Why? Because Jesus entire life was to fulfill Israel’s vocation for her. The history of Israel simply typifies the life of Christ. Let’s examine this. First of all if we look at the history of Israel we see the following:

- 1) Miracle birth through the promised son Isaac.
- 2) King David was from Bethlehem.
- 3) Hosea 11:1 shows Israel was brought out of Egypt to fulfill a promise.
- 4) Pharaoh tries to destroy Israel.
- 5) Moses rises as Savior of Israel.
- 6) Israel was baptized in the Red Sea. (1 Cor 10:2).
- 7) Israel spent 40 years in the desert wandering.
- 8) Joshua leads them into the promised land.
- 9) They were told to destroy the inhabitants to avoid contamination but they failed in this mission.
- 10) Israel dies under the old covenant but rises under the new.

Now let’s look at the history of Jesus and see how it replicates that of Israel:

- 1) Miracle birth through Mary.
- 2) Was the King born in Bethlehem.
- 3) Matt 2:13 brought Jesus out of Egypt to allow Israel to fulfill the promise.
- 4) Herod rather than Pharaoh tries to destroy Jesus.
- 5) Jesus, not Moses rises as Savior of Israel. (Moses typifies Christ).
- 6) Jesus baptized in the Jordan, rather than the Red Sea.
- 7) Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted.
- 8) Yeshua (same name as Joshua) leads us into the promised land.
- 9) Yeshua rids the land of evil.
- 10) Yeshua dies under the old covenant to rise under the new.

In addition, Jesus, (Yeshua), cleanses the promised land. Since Joshua was unsuccessful in doing so the first problem was that the demons stayed there in the promised land. Secondly, the diseases that the ungodly had in the promised land remained there as God promised, “If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep His covenant of love with you, as He swore to your forefathers. . . . The LORD will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but He will inflict them on all who hate you. You must destroy all the peoples the LORD your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you” (Deut 7:12-16, see also Deut 28:60, Ex 15:26). Third, the Jews failed in becoming a holy nation so that other nations would know the Lord. Therefore, Jesus took care of this problem when He came by doing the following:

- 1) Cast out demons that came from the Canaanite tribes Joshua left.

- 2) Healed the sick due to the sin and disobedience in the land.
- 3) Taught Israel how to bring back truth and empowered them with the Spirit to go to the nations and fulfill their purpose.

There are many other similarities of Christ living out Israel's history. In Acts 1:4 we see the disciples were told to wait for the Spirit and His power. In essence, Jesus did empower some and is going to empower many more to do what He called Israel to do from the beginning. In Acts 2 this is fulfilled at the Biblical festival of Shavuot (Pentecost) when they were filled with the Spirit, allowing them to speak the ways of God. Exodus 19 showed Israel was to be a Kingdom of priests to the nations, "Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, *you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Ex 19:4-6). The problem is that Israel never fulfilled their calling so Christ empowers them to do so and is faithful to His promises. Ironically, this mission and the law were given on Mount Sinai at Shavuot hundreds of years earlier where 3000 men died that day. Here at Pentecost, the law and God's Word is spoken and 3000 were saved. Just as in the Old Testament the Law was the means of the mission, in the New Testament, the Spirit is given at Pentecost when people were in Jerusalem from all over the world and the mission could go to the nations. Likewise, it is the Spirit that makes them a "holy nation" themselves. Thus Jesus makes Israel holy, enables her to be a priestly nation and reach others with the word to fulfill the mission of Israel and be the envy of nations. What is the result? The Gentiles come into this holy nation.

With all of this said, Israel's restoration is still not complete, however, because many of Israel do not believe. This is yet a future fulfillment in Christ's second coming.

5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say-as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say-"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

Having just finished telling us that we will prevail when judged because of Christ's faithfulness to His covenant and His righteousness, Paul now answers the logical question many were asking. Why is God upset when we sin since it makes Him look good? After all Jesus gave us the illustration, "'Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.'" (Luke 7:41-43). The one who has been forgiven much loves much because the one who forgives is put up on a pedestal. The more that is forgiven, the higher the pedestal. Therefore, why not keep borrowing money since we know our moneylender is going to forgive us. That way, when the debt is forgiven, the moneylender will look really good and we will love him that much more.

Can you see the problem when this analogy is taken that far? If we take advantage of the moneylenders grace, we really won't appreciate it when it is given. Partly because we expect the gift as an obligation, not as a gift. Also, since it is viewed as an obligation, not only do not appreciate the gift, but we don't appreciate the gift-giver. How silly would it be if the moneylender would decide to collect the debt, and we said, "but don't you want to look good?" "How can you collect this debt when we were making you look so kind and loving as we were borrowing all this money, knowing you weren't going to expect us to pay it back?" Likewise there are those who think that the more they sin, the more they make Christ look good. They think the more heinous their past, the more holy and experienced they are now. It is almost as if they are proud of their sinful past and take some credit for the grace God has given them.

It is true that the more we are forgiven and the greater the sin that is forgiven, causes us to love and appreciate Christ all the more. However, when we take pride or credit in any of it, all the appreciation and love is voided out. This is a human argument, not a spiritual one. It seeks to honor the flesh, not the spirit. It makes God out to be a proud, arrogant Creator, rather than a loving, merciful and gracious Lord. If this is how God was, how could He judge the world being so unjust in forgiving sins simply to receive glory? Though He does receive glory, this isn't why God forgives sin. The most common of verses says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-18). Christ doesn't just forgive sin, He paid for them with His blood. Let's say your mother was raped and the police caught the rapist red-handed. When he went before the judge, the judge just decided to forgive him and let him go. What kind of judge would that be? He would be an unjust, corrupt one. Likewise, it is just as unjust for God to forgive sins when there has to be a punishment for the crime. Therefore, for God to forgive sins just to receive glory and praise would be like the judge letting the rapist go because he felt like it. True justice demands a penalty. Christ, in His justness, paid that penalty with His life, given in place of our own. God's justice, holiness, righteousness and truthfulness is what gives Christ the right to judge the world. For God so loved us, that He willingly gave His son so that justice could be satisfied.

Isn't it amazing that even after understanding what Christ has done, many people still have the attitude illustrated in these verses. Take heed to the following verses: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13). "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16-17). If this is your attitude of God's grace then I know who you are. "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 3-4).

As verse eight clearly tells us, those who have the attitude that good results from evil are justly godless and condemned men. Just as John 3:16 is referring to God's love, it is also referring to God's wrath as we continue in those verses: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, **but** whoever does not believe *stands condemned*

already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but *men loved darkness instead of light* because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that *what he has done has been done through God*" (John 3:17-21). To God be the glory because He is just in His condemnation and lovingly merciful to His children as He gives grace to them.

9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." 13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." 14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways, 17 and the way of peace they do not know." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

To keep the Gentiles from becoming conceited themselves (as it seems we have today), Paul makes it clear that we are no better than the Jew because we are both under the law of sin inherited by us from Adam. Even though there may be some advantages to being a Jew, when it comes to salvation, all of us must be justified equally by the same blood. The blood of Jesus! Both Jew and Gentile had failed to keep the law and are counted as sinners.

The proof of the above statements is coming from the Old Testament Scriptures as quoted from Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3. The text seems to be telling us that no one seeks God. However, as we search the Scriptures we can find all kinds of passages where we are told to seek God. How can this be if no one seeks God? After all, we read in the Scriptures, "I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who *did not seek Me*. To a nation that did not call on My name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (Isa 65:1). "For the *Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). "No one can come to Me *unless the Father who sent Me draws him*" (John 6:44). The fact is, that no one can seek Christ unless the Father draws him to do so.

Yet we have the following verses saying that men can and do seek God:

- "“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD” (Jer 29:13-14).
- "“The people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God” (Jer 50:4).
- "“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matt 7:7).
- "“Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king” (Hos 3:5). (See also Hosea 5:6,15; 10:12; Amos 5:4-6; Zeph 2:3; Mat 6:33; Acts 15:17; Heb 11:6).

There is no contradiction here. The truth remains that no one can seek God without His drawing men to him, however, since God desires that none should perish, He has extended His arm and call out to everyone. We read in Timothy, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3-4).

The other aspect is that the verses quoted from Psalm 14 and 53 are referring to the ungodly. These are men who, even though God is calling them, refuse to come. Therefore, we must be careful not to apply these minority of verses to say that man can not seek God and ignore the vast number that say man can. Instead, we must understand that man must seek God, as the Spirit of God enables him to do so or else he will perish. Without the Spirit drawing man, he indeed could not seek the Lord but God, in His love, has enabled and offered that Spirit to every man so they can do so if they desire. “For God so loved *the world* that He gave His one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the *world* through Him” (John 3:16-17).

As we examine verses 10-12 we see that there are a number of qualities the ungodly possess, whether Jew or Gentile. 1) unrighteous, 2) can not understand, 3) won’t seek God, 4) Willingly turn away from God, 5) Worthless, and 6) Evil.

Point number two declares that no one “understands.” The word doesn’t mean in an intellectual capacity, rather a lack of understanding in the heart to know God. The Scriptures declare that, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). All men have inherited original sin from Adam and are born with a bias against God. We are unrighteous and unable to understand who God is and, therefore, have no desire to seek Him even from the moment we are born. The flesh wants nothing to do with God and His laws, which is why men do evil things and are worthless or offensive to God in their flesh. However, since God desires that all men be saved, He has placed in us a conscience to know what is right and wrong. He also has given us His Spirit to draw us to Him and go against what we are by nature. Though none do good, God empowers men to change and seek Him. As Psalms 14 and 53 continues to tell us, “Salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad” (Ps 14:7).

Verses 13-18 continue with the same theme of the ungodly. Keep in mind that these characteristics do not apply to those who believe in Christ. So far Romans has been talking about those who reject God and His testimony of Creation. Therefore, here in chapter three we see the same people both within the Jewish and Gentile nations are being discussed. Likewise, Psalms 14 and 53 begin by saying it is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. It is these fools we are describing here in Romans. Their throats are open graves. These men are dead inside. Food which normally gives living sustenance to most people as it goes down the throat and into the stomach, in this case, simply keeps dead men alive. These men don’t realize that their life is pointless and empty. Paul is actually quoting another Psalm here where the wicked that do not accept God’s call are described “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.” These verses continue, however, to make

a distinction between those who humble themselves and those who don't. "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy" (Ps 5:9-11).

The poison of vipers is coming out of their mouth because their words are nothing but cursings and the bitterness from their hearts. As Jesus said, "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:20-23). This poison not only is destructive to others, but it eats away at their own flesh as well. Psalms speaks of the wicked in the same words, "They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from men of violence who plan to trip my feet." (Ps 140:3-4). There is indeed a distinction between the lips of wicked and Godly men. The wicked love to speak cursings, "He loved to pronounce a curse--may it come on him; he found no pleasure in blessing--may it be far from him" (Ps 109:17). Yet with the righteous it is different, "The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment" (Prov 10:21). We also read in the New Testament, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess His name" (Heb 13:15). Yet of the power of the tongue of the wicked we read, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

Verse 15 shows the contrast between the feet of wicked men and those who answer God's call. The ungodly run to do evil but the humble can say, "I run in the path of Your commands, for You have set my heart free" (Ps 119:32).

Verse 15 is also quoted from Isaiah where we find the true intent of these verses: "Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace" (Isa 59:7-8; see also Prov 1:16). These fools also are quick to kill and murder because they have no respect for God or men. Everywhere they go they leave a trail of misery and destruction. One can see this with the ungodly today. They leave a wake of hurt, lies and ruin upon leaving anyplace. However, for those who listen to God's call, seek Him and repent there is hope as Isaiah continues: "The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so His own arm worked salvation for him, and His own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak" (Isa 59:15-17). Even among this hopelessness, Christ would bring salvation. Any Jew reading this verse in Romans would have known these verses in Isaiah and, if willing to listen to God's calling, should have heard and recognized that Jesus was the man who brought forth this justice and righteousness for them when they could not because they had broken God's just laws.

Verse 16 shows these ungodly men don't even know what peace is because they don't know the Prince of Peace. The Psalmists writes, "An oracle is within my heart

concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes” (Ps 36:1). The Bible has many verses telling us the importance of the fear of God. Consider the following select few:

- “The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (Prov 15:33).
- “Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil” (Prov 15:16).
- “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death” (Prov 14:27).
- “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy one is understanding” (Prov 9:10).
- “Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Ps 34:11).
- “Now let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery” (2 Chron 19:7).
- “And he will delight in the fear of the LORD” (Isa 11:3).
- “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31).

The wicked do not fear God or give Him reverence because they don’t know Him, yet a day is coming when they will fear Him, “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand’” (Rev 6:16-17)! The Isaiah verses quoted in verse 15 also continue to elaborate on what will happen to these foolish men when they refuse to repent: “According to what they have done, so will He repay wrath to His enemies and retribution to His foes; He will repay the islands their due. From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere His glory. For He will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along. ‘The Redeemer will come to Zion, *to those in Jacob who repent of their sins*’ declares the LORD” (Isa 59:18-20). Again, the Jews would have known these verses and Paul was clearly telling them that if they would repent they would be saved by the blood of Jesus, the Redeemer who came from Zion and of whom all were aware. However, if they did not repent God’s wrath would remain on them.

The sum of these verses quoted from Psalms and Isaiah were not so much to describe the state of man in his flesh, as much as to point to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and the Jews were missing Him. Any Jew would have known that these verses were pointing to the Messiah. They could no longer consider their traditions and outward acts of obedience as a means of God’s favor because no one can keep the law perfectly. Even back in the days of their forefathers, men could not live up to the standards of God’s righteousness. There was no favor outside of the Redeemer. Jesus fit the description and thus, Jesus was the Messiah. Any man putting confidence in his own flesh would have to realize that he needed the Messiah that would come to save all who would follow Him.

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

All of the commands in the law speak clearly so nobody can give an excuse for their sin. Every mouth is silenced and the entire world will be held accountable to that law. The Jews had the law on stone and were considered to be under the law, however, the Gentiles had the testimony of creation and the law in their conscience so they, too, as part of the world will be silenced.

Anyone trying to justify themselves in God's sight will be disappointed. The Psalmist realized that "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps 143:2). Therefore, anyone trying to point to any work of their own will be silenced easily. A man may seem right in his eyes until his conduct is compared to a rule or regulation. All God will need to do is ask a question or two. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever stolen anything, even a cookie out of the cookie jar when mom told you no cookies? Have you ever committed adultery? Telling even one little white lie makes you a liar just as one murder makes you a murderer (and by the way, Jesus said in Matthew 5 that if you have ever had hate in your heart you are a murderer). If you steal one thing, even a paper clip from work you are a thief. Jesus also told us in Matthew 5 that if you look with lust upon someone you commit adultery. These are strict commands from the law and they will indeed silence every mouth. As the Scriptures testify, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:4-6). Since everyone knows they have sinned and this is lawlessness (because you break one command you break them all) we will be silent before our Judge. Jesus tells us a parable of a man who tried to get into heaven on his own merits in the New Testament, however, He shows that it is futile: "'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless" (Matt 22:12). In Psalms we read, "The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths" (Ps 107:42). The upright can rejoice because their sins are covered, but the wicked will know they have nothing or no one in their defense.

Another purpose of the law was to make men conscious of their own sin. Anybody who is honest (and if your not, you already broke the law), who is trying to justify themselves by the law can easily see they failed. The intent then, is to show men their failures so that they can repent and look to Christ who overcame in their place. Christ gives us an example of this intent, "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:11-14).

In essence we see that the law shows us a dead end by which there is only one escape. If one wants to live under the law he must come to terms with the fact that, “Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death” (Rom 7:9-10).

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished- 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

In these first verses there are two usages of the word “law.” The first one refers simply to the Ten Commandments, while the second is in reference to the first five books of the Bible. The “Law and the Prophets” is a term that is often used in the Bible as a reference to the whole Old Testament. It was from the Law and the Prophets that all the New Testament apostles, and even Jesus Himself, used to spread the Gospel (Matt 5:17; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 24:27; Acts 13:15; 28:2). Indeed, “All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His Name” (Acts 10:42-43). This fact alone shows the Old Testament clearly revealed the Gospel because the law pointed to, or testified of Christ. Moses wrote about the Word of God saying, “It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deut 30:12-14). It wasn’t a hidden secret that the Law and the Prophets were testifying about the Messiah.

After showing man’s failure to be righteous by observing the law, Paul now gives us the answer to man’s problem. God, has presented a righteousness for man that is apart from the law that even the law itself testified about. It is a righteousness that is by faith in Jesus to anyone who will believe. As Paul declared in verse 21, this was not a foreign teaching as it was in the Law, “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-but the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). If this righteousness was by faith for those who believe, what exactly were they to believe in? Not just the Holy Scriptures within the Law and the Prophets, but the Jesus these Scriptures are testifying about. It seems too easy doesn’t it? Even today we have many who do not grasp this concept and continue to try and justify themselves by means of good deeds and their ability to resist sin. In some cases there are those who elevate a certain doctrine and believe that in keeping this one doctrine they are “better” than other believers. This is exactly what the Jews did, but they were wrong. These people would do well to remember that breaking just one command, present or past, dooms you to hell. The Gospel is truly so easy that it is difficult for most to understand.

There are two words used here in verses 21 and 22, “faith” and “believe.” Herein lies the problem. Many think that just believing in Christ is enough to receive His righteousness. This is not true for, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder” (James 2:19). There is no question the devil believes in Jesus. An intellectual knowledge and acceptance of a truth is not the same thing as faith. Faith is trusting in, and accepting fully the object of that faith. I propose that there are many in the church today who believe, but do not have faith which is why there is so little evidence of that faith in their lives. It is faith that will produce fruit from God, not belief. Faith puts your trust in Jesus so that He becomes Lord and you allow Him to direct and lead your life. It is as we read in Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:20-21)! Faith is as simple as surrendering your all. Stop trying to earn your merit or approval and just accept Christ’s free give of grace.

Verse 22 ends by again pointing out that there is no difference between Jews under the law or Gentiles who did not have the written code when it comes to sin and justification from that sin. (This is not to say there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in vocation, however). All are guilty of sin and fall short so that they must all be justified in the same way. It doesn’t matter how close you get, if you are short, you fail. There are those who think they are pretty good because they don’t smoke, drink, drug it up or be unfaithful to their spouse. They think they are “close” but they still fall short, and in God’s eyes, are not even close. As Jesus said of the Pharisees, “For they loved praise from men more than praise from God” (John 12:43).

Verse 24 shows us that all who have fallen short are justified by only one way, and, to make it better, it is a free way. This is not to mean there was no cost for Christ, but rather no cost to you. As Paul says, “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:20; see also 1 Cor 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1). Again, though we honor God, there is no merit of your own that will be accepted for justification. You may think that you were close to righteousness on your own, however, none of that counts. “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our *righteous acts* are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Isa 64:6). I have heard many people say that our sins are like filthy rags, however, that isn’t what Isaiah said. It is our “righteous” acts that are filthy in God’s sight. Anything done apart from Christ and faith is sin (Rom 14:23). Why is it so hard for us to accept a free gift without feeling we have to give something back?

Verse 25 says Christ was presented as a “sacrifice of atonement.” The word here is literally, *hilasterion* and is only used one other time in the New Testament in Hebrews 9:5 where it refers to the Mercy Seat, or cover of the Ark of the Covenant. It was the cover on which the blood of the sacrificial goat was poured upon (Lev 16:14-15). Christ is, therefore, symbolized by the cover of that Ark, but moreso, not just the cover itself, but also by the means of which the atonement took place by the pouring out of blood upon it. John says of Jesus, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Also verse 25 explains the free gift more clearly. God the father presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. All the Old Testament sacrifices merely pointed to this one

final fulfillment of atonement. Just as the sins of the people were placed on the sacrificial goat on the Day of Atonement for thousands of years, the prophets write of the Messiah “After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by His knowledge My righteous servant will justify many, and He *will bear their iniquities*” (Isa 53:11). The atonement itself, however, isn’t applied unless one has faith in the sacrifice of Jesus.

God did this to demonstrate His justice. As we discussed in chapter one, God is just and that is why sin had to be paid for, not just forgiven. Jesus had to die in order for forgiveness to occur because a just God doesn’t just forgive sins, they must be atoned for. As Hebrews tells us, “Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins” (Heb 9:22). The word, “redemption” back in verse 24 reflects this truth as it is used only ten times in the New Testament. It is a word that implies a ransom or price paid to free a captive. Christ gave His very life-blood to ransom us (Lev 17:11). As we read in Ephesians, “In Him we have redemption *through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Eph 1:7).

In God’s forbearance, that is His omniscient knowledge that Adam and Eve would sin, that the world would be thrust into sin, and that He would send His Son to redeem man from that curse, God had left the sins committed before Christ unpunished. When those outside of the covenant died in the Old Testament they didn’t go to hell but *sheol*. Think about it. If Jesus had not yet come to earth to die and rise from the dead, where could people of the Old Testament go when they died? This is a question that many people don’t ever think about because it is too far removed from our reality today. We know that when we die we will go to be with the Lord, therefore, we naturally think, everybody must have done so. This isn’t really what the Bible says, however. In the Old Testament, when people died, they all went to a place called *sheol*, which is often translated as “grave, pit or hell.” In Genesis we see that Jacob mourns for his son who is believed to be dead: “All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. ‘No’ he said, ‘in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.’ So his father wept for him” (Gen 37:35). So great was Jacob’s grief that he said he would mourn until the day he went to the grave. The word used for “grave” is *sheol*, which is simply the place of departed spirits and is seen 65 times in the Old Testament (see Job 3:13-19). Whether you were godly or ungodly, you went to *sheol*. We see that the prophecy of Christ tells us Jesus went there as well, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Ps 16:10). Yet at the same time, the wicked receive punishment there: “For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell” (Deut 32:22). Note, that this verse suggests different levels of *sheol* by saying “lowest” hell. (See also Num 16:30; Ps 9:17 and Matt 11:23). At the same time, the same place is considered to be a place of reward for the righteous (Hos 13:14; cf. 1 Cor 15:55).

To understand what *sheol* is we need to look at a story told by Jesus in the New Testament. “There was a certain rich man. . . And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table . . the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell [*hadee*] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. . . between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence

to you cannot; neither can they pass to us” (Luke 16:19-26). The word “hell” (*hadēe* in Greek) is the same word for Sheol in Hebrew. Here we see that both Lazarus and the rich man went to *hadēe* or *sheol*.

We often think of *hadēe* as the burning fires of hell but that isn’t necessarily the case. I believe that this “parable” Jesus told us here isn’t a parable at all, rather a true story. As you look at Jesus’ parables, in none of them does He ever use a personal name. He may say, “there once was a king,” or “there once was a man” but He never uses names. In this story Jesus names a real person named Lazarus. He also names Abraham, a real, living spirit. The “rich man” goes to the same place upon death that Lazarus does, however, it seems that this *hadēe* is separated into two sections. People cannot pass from the lower portion to the upper portion. The lower portion, where the rich man is, is still a place of torment since he is very thirsty. The rich man can see the upper portion of *hadēe/sheol* but there is no indication that Lazarus, who is in peace, can see into the lower portion. Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham which is very significant. Why didn’t he go to the bosom of God or Christ? Because Jesus had not come yet, thus, paradise isn’t ready at this time. This may be the Bible’s best indication as to what *sheol* was. Vines Biblical Dictionary even says, “Jesus’ teaching in Luke 16:19-31 seems to reflect accurately the Old Testament concept of *she’ol* . . . one side of which is occupied by the suffering, unrighteous dead separated by a great chasm from the other side peopled by the righteous dead enjoying their reward” (from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

Understanding this concept, we may have insight into another glorious truth revealed in the Biblical Festivals discussed in earlier newsletters and on one of our DVD’s in the CIA seminar series. In Ephesians we read, “When He ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men” or in the KJV “When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8). What do these verses mean? Who or what was being held captive? Where did Christ lead them? What were these “gifts” given to men? I think in *sheol* lies the answer.

When Jesus died he descended into *sheol*: “By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19). The word for preached here means to “proclaim.” It seems that Christ proclaimed His victory to those in *sheol* before ascending. When He did ascend, however, he led captives in His train or captivity was led captive. Could these be the people who were captives in the upper, good portion of *sheol* who were now being led to paradise to be with Jesus? Is that why Ephesians says that He “gave gifts unto men?” The Scriptures may indicate so. We see that the thief on the cross was told that that very day he would be with God in paradise. The thief didn’t go to *sheol* as O.T. people did. Interestingly, we also see that when Jesus rose from the dead, so did others who had died previously. We read, “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt 27:52-53). Is it possible that when Christ went down to *sheol*, He led the people in the upper portion free and led them in His train to paradise when He resurrected?

The Biblical Festivals may suggest this to be true. Newsletters on our website show how Christ fulfilled the Passover in every detail. Likewise, the second festival commanded in the Bible was the Feast of Firstfruits, three days after Passover. It was this very day that Jesus rose from the dead. It was also on this day that the priests were to be

taking the first fruit offering of the harvest and wave it before the Lord. God was to have the firstfruits. When Jesus rose from the dead, He offered to the Father, the firstfruits of men who had previously been in *sheol*. We read in Revelation about the saints of God, “These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Rev 14:4). We also see that Christ offered Himself as the firstfruit offering as well: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . Christ the firstfruits” (1 Cor 15:20-23). It makes sense that since Christ lives in us, we, too, are firstfruits. Praise be to God!

That Jesus was fulfilling the firstfruit festival is also clear when we know that the priests were to go into seclusion for three days after the Passover and not to be seen or touched by anyone until the firstfruit offering was made. When Mary ran out to the empty tomb, Jesus had already risen, but had not yet ascended and led captives to their gifts in His firstfruit offering. When Mary goes to touch Him, He says, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father” (John 20:17). Yet after His ascension He tells Thomas to touch Him in Luke 24:39.

It may be good to add a little side-note to this topic as well. Jehovah’s Witnesses and 7th Day Adventists both teach that when we die today, we simply sleep until the resurrection at Christ’s return. They say that the thief on the cross was told, “Verily I say unto thee Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise” rather than, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Note the change in commas). First of all, this would be redundant to say, “Verily I say today.” Secondly, it goes against the Scriptures that say, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). “I desire to depart and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23). “Whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:26). (See also, 1 John 5:11-13, 2 Tim 1:10 where life (*zoen*) and immortality (*aphtharsian*) are distinguished. Life is given upon belief (1 John 5:11-12) and immortality when new bodies are given to the spirit in Revelation). Thirdly, it would also go against the Festival of Firstfruits and the resurrected saints appearing to those in Jerusalem.

Clearly, as believers in Christ, we can be confident that upon death, we will not go to *sheol* in sleep, but we will be conscious of life and redemption in and with Jesus. We won’t be in the bosom of Abraham, but in the bosom of our Creator, Savior and Friend, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel who has come in the flesh. Thank you Jesus!

Back to the verses at hand. Another aspect of the sins committed beforehand being left unpunished can be seen in Hebrews, “For this reason Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Heb 9:15). In the Old Testament times, the promise was looked to as a future event. Though they had faith that one day their sins would be completely covered (as foreshadowed in the sacrifices) it was still in the future. But now that Christ has died as a ransom, there is a new covenant under which our sins are no longer counted against us. As David declared, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom 4:8). Job even declared in the Old Testament before the Law was given, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me” (Job 19:25-27).

In verse 26 we see that the reason God left these sins unpunished was to demonstrate His justice on the cross. As mentioned earlier, God couldn't simply forgive sins because that would not demonstrate justice. Christ had to pay for those sins so that in acquitting us of sins, He would remain holy, just and pure. In the past these sins had not been paid for but they are presently covered and forgiveness is there for anyone who will accept it. The justice can only come through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice for us, because our merits would not bring justice. Without faith, that atonement isn't applied to your account. When Christ died on the cross, His blood paid the penalty for all sins for all people, both Jew and Gentile. Paul writes, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). However, though the money is in the bank, you might say, unless one makes a withdrawal through faith, the money/blood sits there without being able to put it to use. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Verse 26 closes by saying, "so as to be just and the *one* who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." In other words, Christ was not only just in the means of His bringing justification, He is also the ONLY ONE by which this means could come about.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. 29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, 30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. 31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

This section then gives the conclusion to the previous verses. If all are sinful and fall short of God's glory, there is no need for the Jew or Gentile to boast over one another. Though the Jews observed the law, they failed at keeping it fully. Though the Gentiles did not have the law, "they became a law for themselves" in following their conscience, yet still failed to keep it fully. Therefore, as verse 28 declares, both are excluded from boasting because faith is the means by which salvation comes, and in this, Christ gets to boast since He is the one who grants faith.

Verse 29 addresses the misnomer that God was only for the Jew. God chose the Jew for a vocation to bring the Good News to all nations around them. This is clearly stated when God gives Abraham the covenant in Genesis 15-17. In their very calling, it is clear that God would be a God of the Gentiles too, He would simply use the Jew to accomplish this.

Verse 30 also makes it clear that there is not a God of the Jew and a God of the Gentile, rather one God for all people. The circumcised Jew will be justified by the penalty of sin being placed upon Jesus and applied to their account upon faith. Likewise, the uncircumcised Gentile will be justified by the same means and receive the benefit by the same faith.

Verse 31 closes the chapter by answering what seems to be a logical question. If the law doesn't save you, shouldn't we just get rid of it. The answer is an adamant NO! Instead, the law is to be upheld even though we are not under it as a rule for salvation.

Paul basically says the same truth in Galatians, “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:22-27).

In our westernized Christianity today, we have the unfortunate attitude that the law is null and void. It is almost as if we ignore this very important verse. Timothy writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious” (1 Tim 1:8-9; see Rom 7:16 also). There is a practical purpose for the law. First it is used to convict the ungodly of sin. Second it is used as a mirror for the godly to see themselves as well. The law stating we should not lie shows even the best of believers that they have fallen short. This realization of such utter sin should make the Christian be all the more thankful to Jesus for His mercy in withholding punishment and taking it upon Himself. We also read the words of Jesus, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-19). The last time I checked heaven and earth were still here so not even a yod, the smallest stroke of a pen in the Hebrew language has disappeared from the Law. Does the church live by this today?

As a result of a skewed view of the law, the church has chosen to nullify many parts of the Old Testament rather than understand them. One practical example of many is where Paul is discussing the resurrection of Christ and its affect on our resurrection in the future. Paul is making a case for the resurrection to answer those critics like the Sadducees that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Paul says, “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them” (1 Cor 15:29)? Most commentaries and churches today simply look at these verses and get confused. Certainly we should not be baptized for the dead. Therefore, in order to come up with an answer to this puzzling verse they search their minds and logic, rather than the law and the prophets to explain it. The typical explanation is that Paul was referring to a pagan custom of that time in which some were being baptized for loved ones who had passed on, much like the Mormons practice today. This explanation is unwarranted by the text, or the rest of the Scriptures but, since we have such a poor view of the law, our own minds justify the answer anyway. Besides, why would Paul use a pagan custom to illustrate a Godly truth?

So what is the answer to this puzzling verse? It isn't puzzling at all when we look at Numbers 19. Here we see a command that anyone who came into contact with a dead body had to go through a ritual cleansing because they had become unclean. A red heifer was killed, burned, and the ashes were then put into a large basin of water. On the first and third days after coming into contact with a dead body, the unclean person was sprinkled with this water. On the seventh day, they were immersed, (literally baptized) in this water. Today, as in the days of Jesus, it is an honor to prepare the body of a dead relative for the resurrection by anointing them with spices and wrapping them in cloth

(Just as they were going to do with the body of Jesus). However, to do so, one must voluntarily become unclean because you will be touching a dead body. Since they believe in the Scriptures that declare the resurrection of the dead, they will gladly become unclean and have to go through the cleansing process where they are baptized on the seventh day. Therefore, Paul is saying if the resurrection is not true, why are some voluntarily becoming unclean and having to be baptized in accordance with the law, for the purpose of preparing the dead for that resurrection.

One more example should be given. I have heard many Gospel sermons on Matthew 5's beatitudes. The problem is, this wasn't really a Gospel sermon. Go back and read it carefully. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-15). Does this sound right to you? If you don't forgive someone, you won't be forgiven? Isn't this a conditional salvation based upon our works? The problem is many don't realize that the ministry of Jesus was under the Law of which He came to fulfill. Just as Romans is trying to illustrate, the law condemns but Christ forgives. After Jesus dies on the cross a different message is given: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, *God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins*, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross [Past tense]" (Col 2:13-14). Now we see that our sins are forgiven, not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done. Again in the beatitudes before the cross we read, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). What if you don't hunger and thirst? After the cross, however, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Now we are filled with the righteousness of God because Christ was made sin for us. Let's continue. Before the cross Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt 5:7). I sure hope I have enough mercy to receive enough back. Yet after the cross we see we are shown mercy, not based upon what we do, but on what Christ did, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3). We also read, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt 5:9). Are you a peacemaker? For your sake I hope so or else you can't be a son of God according to this "Gospel sermon." Yet after the cross we read, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). Isn't this the point of these verses in Romans? There is only one God who will justify all by faith, not whether or not you show mercy or are a peacemaker. Jesus went on to say, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matt 5:20-22). This would be like me telling you that if you aren't better than your pastor or any godly man you know, you can't get into heaven. Clearly, Jesus ministry was under the Law. He was showing these people that they could not be good enough to justify themselves. This is the point of the law! The point of the Gospel is

this: “It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus went on warning, “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny” (Matt 5:25-26). The point of this isn’t really a civil court dispute, rather a heavenly court case in which the matter of sin must be dealt with. The only way to heaven with this current system was to, “Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect” (Mat 5:48). I’m sure glad this isn’t the rule for justification under the new covenant, aren’t you? Yet after the cross we see the gracious answer to this problem, “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28). Praise be to God!!!

These are just two examples of many in which we can see the dangers of nullifying the importance of the law or not understanding it properly. Jesus ministry was under the law and we must be careful applying everything in the “Gospels” as Gospel. I personally don’t believe the Gospels begin until the blood of Jesus was shed, ushering in the New Covenant that Jesus was pointing us to. This is why we read of the Passover meal before the death of Jesus, “In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the *new covenant in My blood*; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Cor 11:25-26). The whole purpose of Christ’s death was to bring us into this new covenant: “For this reason Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Heb 9:15).

We are now under a new kind of law that the old law pointed us to. Paul will explain this later in more detail but for now ponder these words, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. *Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Rom 13:8-10). Sound like the circumcised heart here in Romans? We also read, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). We are now under the law of Christ because he fulfilled the law in our stead. Again, this doesn’t mean the Old Testament is null and void, nor that there is no value in studying it. Rather, it clarifies and helps us to understand the New Covenant when we apply old and new together, not separating the two. I believe this is why Jesus said, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Matt 13:52). Therefore, as Paul concludes at the close of this chapter, let us also agree to “uphold the law.” He warns in Galatians, “But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal 5:13). Peter also instructs, “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the King” (1 Peter 2:16-17). How do we honor the King? By obeying Him out of love *for* Him, not out of obligation or subjection *to* Him!

In a short summary of these first three chapters I believe Adam Clarke sums it up well in his commentary of these verses:

“How is God glorified in us, and we in Him?-By His GRACE. What does His grace work in us?-True holiness. Upon what motive?-Because it is pleasing to Him. By whom does He give us salvation?-By Jesus Christ. How has Christ obtained this for us?-By redeeming us. What price did He give?-His BLOOD. What does His blood effect?-It reconciles us to God. How is it applied?-By FAITH. Who has given this victim of reconciliation?-God the Father. Why did He choose these means?-To confound the false righteousness of the Gentiles; to abolish the FIGURATIVE righteousness of the Jews; and to establish His own righteousness. What does this grace of God perform?-It pardons sin and purifies the heart. For whom is this designed?-For all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles. To whom are these blessings actually communicated? To all who repent, turn from their sin, and believe on the Lord Jesus. Why did not God make known this grand method of salvation sooner? (1) To make it all the more valuable. (2) To show His fidelity in the performance of His promises. And, (3) To make known the virtue and efficacy of the blood of Christ, which sanctifies the present, extends its influence to the past, and continues the availing sacrifice and way of salvation to all future ages”

Romans 4

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul now goes to the Biblical history of the Jew to support his claims in chapter three. The Jews found pride in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham, whom God gave the covenant to. They found their lineage as a means of justification but Jesus told them, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt 3:8-9). Abraham "discovered" the same truth Paul is trying to get across. He was not unaware of the fact that it was God's grace that brought mercy to him.

Verse two gives a statement that shows how ridiculous it would be to be justified by works. It is not unreasonable for the human mind to think that Abraham, having been called out of the paganism of his father's religion, might find merit in the fact that he left his father. Certainly if anyone could be "good enough" they would have something to boast about, but not before God who created them. Even then, they would owe all they have and did to God as John points out, "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:21). And even if one feels he has been good enough to boast about his deeds, remember these words of Paul who seemed very godly, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Cor 4:4-5).

However, it was not Abraham's works that justified him. This was important to point out as the Jew might find Abraham's circumcision as a means of his justification. Though the NIV does not make this clear, verse one really asks what Abraham discovered in his "flesh" in regard to this matter. This implies as well that the Jew was looking to the fleshly circumcision of Abraham to have merit for justification. Paul will address this in the next verses.

Verse three begins by quoting the authority to support this truth, the Word of God in Genesis 15:6. Abraham's belief and faith, and nothing else, brought about the righteousness that he had. What is faith? "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:1-3). Just as Abraham was commended for believing the promise of God, we, too, must have faith in the promises and Word of God. Isn't it amazing how few have faith that the universe was created at God's command? What does this say about the state of the church today?

4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who

justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

The argument of good works earning your ticket to heaven is defeated upon the very nature of work itself. Work brings wages that are an obligation. Grace is not an obligation and the entire covenant given to Abraham was based on grace. Abraham was given the covenant in Genesis 15. When he got up to chase the birds away that were coming to eat the animals that had been split in two, God put him to sleep. Abraham could have no part in the work needed to be done in this covenant. Also, this covenant is a common historical ritual. Animals were split in half and each part laid opposite one another. The blood from each half would drain into a small trench between the pieces and then both parties making the covenant would walk through this bloody trench. The idea was that if one or the other broke their end of the covenant, what was done to these animals could be done to them. In Abraham's case, however, only God passed through the pieces. Abraham did not because there would be no merit of his own with this covenant promise. This is why God states over and over that this is "My covenant" throughout Genesis 15 and 17. Therefore, the man who works receives his pay as an obligation, providing he does his work. The law ensures that no man can do the work. So then what?

Verse five explains. For the man who realizes he can't do the job and does not work, his trust and faith in God and His covenant promise, has his gift applied by grace. The result is a thankful heart, rather than a boasting spirit. It is God alone who can justify the wicked and we are all wicked. In fact, there is no human being that is too wicked to be justified if they would believe these words. Therefore, God is not just nice, He is necessary for righteousness. Just as Abraham believed in that promise and it was credited to him as righteousness so, too, our faith is credited to us as righteousness. The authority of the Scriptures makes this clear.

Verse six continues with the Scriptural proof. Not only was Abraham a hero of the Jewish people, but David, too, was a heavy weight champion when it came to religious roots. Yet David was a lust filled murderer so how could he speak of the blessings of God's grace who had forgiven him despite his wickedness? David understood that he had earned nothing, rather it was righteousness given to him by God and he could take no credit, but only believe and be thankful. Even he, and us, have broken the law, yet God looks at us as if we have kept it perfectly. This was even part of this grand covenant in which God would bless all nations through Abraham, by which the Messiah would come. Psalm 32:1-2 is where David speaks of this blessedness that the following verses will reiterate.

7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." 9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So

then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. 12 And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

The meaning of the words of David from Psalm 32 is plainly stated in this chapter of Romans. Any man who doesn't work but trusts in God is blessed beyond description. Though man is wicked, there are those who God imputes righteousness when their sins are forgiven. Forgiveness isn't remembering the sin and taking away the consequence of it, it is forgetting the sin and covering it so that it will never be brought up or even thought of again. It is as if the sin had never happened. We read in the Psalms, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12). What a blessing indeed! These sins will NEVER be counted against us because they are covered by the blood of Jesus and are no more to be seen, EVER!

Verse nine begs the question of who this blessing is for. Is it only for the Jew to whom God made this covenant, or is it also for the Gentile who was not circumcised. After all, circumcision was a sign of the covenant showing that you were under God's promise (Gen 17). Therefore, if you are not circumcised, how can the blessings of the covenant apply to you? Naturally, Abraham's faith was what gave him righteousness, but yet he was also circumcised. Could this circumcision have anything to do with his righteousness?

Verse ten answers begins to show that circumcision played no part in righteousness. Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness before he was ever circumcised, therefore, it wasn't the act of circumcision that was important for salvation. Looking carefully at Genesis 15 and 16 we see that Abraham had faith in God at least one year before Ishmael was born (although I believe it probably began when God called him out of Ur). Yet when circumcision is instituted, Ishmael is already 13 years old since Abraham was 86 years old (Gen 16:16) when this child was born and 99 years old at the instruction of circumcision (Gen 17:24-25). Therefore, this wasn't a simultaneous faith then circumcision event.

If not for salvation, what good is circumcision? Verse eleven explains that it was two things: a sign and a seal. First it was an outward sign and declaration of the faith Abraham had in God and His covenant. Second, it was a seal. The word here is *sfragida* from the word *esfragistheete* and literally means a mark of genuineness. It is only used four times in the New Testament outside of this verse and in Revelation (1 Cor 9:2, 2 Tim 2:19, Eph 1:13, 2 Cor 1:22). In Revelation it refers to the seals of the scroll or the seal put on the forehead of the 144,000 (Rev 7). It was a mark by which God had set apart certain people for protection. Likewise, here, the sign of circumcision was God's seal to set people apart as children of the covenant.

One might say that if circumcision was a seal, then anyone after Abraham who had it was sealed into the covenant and made righteous. History and the Scriptures show this was not the case. First of all we must remember that according to Genesis 17 everyone was to be circumcised at eight days old. No eight day old baby could make a conscious effort or make a stated desire to be under the covenant. Secondly, many of those babies that were circumcised were not righteous. We read in Hebrews: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time

of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in My anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (Heb 3:7-11). In the next chapter of Hebrews he states again, “Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard *did not combine it with faith*. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said ‘So I declared on oath in My anger, “They shall never enter my rest”’” (Heb 4:1-3). Clearly, the act of being circumcised could not save you, it only made salvation an option to you by becoming a *sign* of the covenant that was now for you as well. Faith in the covenant is what made circumcision a seal. If you look closely at verse eleven it says that circumcision was a “seal of the righteousness that he had by *faith*.” The act of circumcision is merely a sign of the covenant but faith makes that sign a seal, and a firm foundation of righteousness. We read in the New Testament about a similar seal, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. *Having believed*, you were *marked in Him with a seal*, the *promised Holy Spirit*, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:13-14). Once again, we see that faith and belief in the Gospel is what makes the seal effective. The Israelites in the desert had the sign of the covenant but without faith they couldn’t be sealed and, therefore, never entered the rest.

Therefore, Abraham was the father of all who believe even if they were not circumcised. Many did not have the sign of the covenant but believed in it. God credited their faith as righteousness, just as He did with Abraham. They had faith before they were sealed. However, Abraham was also the father of the Jewish people who had been circumcised but, their circumcision was only the first step leading to the next step of faith. They were not only circumcised as a sign of the covenant, but they also chose to walk the walk and talk the talk. They were circumcised in the heart (Rom 2:29) and followed the faith of Abraham that he demonstrated even before his circumcision. In other words, Abraham was much like a Gentile who had believed first, then was circumcised. Therefore, anyone who has faith can now be called a child of Abraham. Whether you believe and take the seal or have the sign and then believe, you are a son of Abraham because he serves as an example for both. Galatians confirms this by saying, “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:7-9). Also, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6). Christ is the tie that binds, not circumcision, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col 3:11). This is why Zaccheus was considered to be a son of Abraham even though he was a Gentile: “Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.’ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:9-10). It is possible that Zaccheus was a “Jew” from one of the lost tribes as described in chapter one of this book, nonetheless,

they were also now classified as Gentiles. The same truth of salvation by faith is seen of Rahab, Ruth and many others within the Old Testament as well.

In the case of both Jew and Gentile, faith is the firm foundation and we build upon that foundation with obedience. Abraham *walked* in faith, meaning he obeyed God. The Israelites were disobedient and never entered the rest despite having the sign. Abraham obeyed God despite having the sign. Obedience matters because if we truly believe and have faith in someone we will do what they ask of us. If we really don't have faith we won't take what they say seriously. This is why James says, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). Obedience means nothing apart from faith because anything done apart from faith is sin (Rom 14:23). Likewise, faith apart from obedience is meaningless because you aren't doing what God asked which means you really don't have faith. Therefore, let us walk in the obedience and faith that Abraham displayed.

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, 15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Circumcision is called part of the law, by which Abraham could not find righteousness. The covenant, or promise that Abraham was given was not part of the law, rather their were "legalistic" signs of the covenant but the promise itself was pure grace that was received by faith. The promise was also not only for Abraham, but for his offspring as well (Gen 12:3) and, as we just looked at in the previous verses, those who have faith are called children of Abraham.

Interestingly, Abraham is heir of the world and all nations of the world will be blessed through him. God created this world for man and those men who are Godly heirs of Abraham will inherit the new heaven and new earth where righteousness will dwell (2 Pet 3:13). The promise in Genesis did not state anything about the world being Abrahams but rather his descendents being like the stars and the land of Canaan was to be his. Although, since the promise was made to Abraham and to his "seed," meaning Christ (Gal 3:16), the world is indeed his inheritance.

Verse 14 explains that the Jews(those who live by law) could not be heirs if Abraham set the precedent of faith as the means of receiving the promise. Had Abraham tried to earn this promise, he would have been cut off from it. The same is true today of anyone who is trying to earn God's promise through morality and religious rules. Faith would be useless if works were a means of earning grace. If there were simply a step by step process to gain grace, one could simply follow the rules and reach the goal without having faith in the Giver of that grace. Some might say that if one is willing to follow those rules, he obviously believes in the Giver. That may be true, but believing in the Giver and having faith in the Giver are two different things. The Devil believes in the Giver but does not have faith in Him. Faith is more than just belief. It is a state of surrendering ones self and trusting in the Giver in all aspects of life. It is offering nothing of your own but placing your very life in the hands of the Giver. The very aspect of what faith is implies that by obeying the law, one could not obtain the promise because it would be obtained by their own merits.

A second problem with trying to obtain the promise by your own works is seen in verse 15. The law brings wrath. Why? Because no person, except Jesus, has been successful in obeying the law fully. You break one command, you break them all Jesus said. Therefore, if you are good 99.9% of the time, the .1% failure brings God's wrath upon your sin. This doesn't even count our sinful nature inherited from Adam which would doom you as well.

Where there is no law there is no transgression. One can not break a rule that isn't there. The problem is, God has written the law on our hearts so it was there even before the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Jews had the written law and the Gentiles had the law of nature (Rom 1:18) and a conscience of which all had sinned against. Therefore, anyone trying to claim that there was no law when Abraham was given this promise would be in error. The fact still remains that Abraham did not receive the promise by obeying, but by believing, trusting and accepting.

Therefore, apart from Christ fulfilling the law, we have all transgressed it. However, since Christ has fulfilled it for us, the law is no longer there to rule us and, therefore, what isn't there, can't be transgressed. This does not mean the law isn't there, it simply means the rules have already been obeyed. Though we obey the law in our hearts because of our love for Christ, we will fail from time to time but God isn't looking at your success and failures, rather Christ's success only. The law is still there but God isn't comparing you to it anymore if all He sees is Christ's righteousness in you. We read in Galatians, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (Gal 3:24-25). The purpose of the law was to show you your inability to merit righteousness because you can't keep the law. We see Christ who did, and we run to Him. Now, the law is no longer our supervisor, but Christ is. Romans will discuss this concept in much greater detail in the following chapters, but for now these few verses will be good reminders:

- "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:20-21).
- "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:3-4).
- "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 9 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers. . . ." (1 Tim 1:8-10).
- "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no

longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise” (Gal 3:15-18).

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

The final conclusion of the matter from the Jews own history is that God gave the covenant to Abraham freely and by no human merits. It was by God's grace received by Abraham's faith. Now, all who are of the faith of Abraham are guaranteed the same privilege by the same means. As Samuel said, “Is not my house right with God? Has He not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will He not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire? But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand” (2 Sam 23:5-6).

Abraham is the “father of many nations” (Gen 17:4-5) and of all who believe, not by physical descent but by spiritual example. Those who try to earn their way into the covenant are not his children. It is in God's sight that those who believe become Abraham's children. It is God who gives the covenant and it is God who knows the heart of men to see their faith. When God sees faith he gives life to those who were as dead men walking and as we read in Ephesians all of us were dead before faith, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:1-3). But now, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:7-9). By God's grace He now calls people children of Abraham who were not physically descended from him and thus “calls things that are not as though they were.”

18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-since he was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Verse 18 begins to explain what faith is. Abraham had hope and believed in God even when all reason and logic said there was no hope. As we see in Hebrews, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1).

Faith is not believing in what can be proven scientifically but trusting in the Word of God without seeing. For some this might seem ridiculous, however, God has given us reason to trust Him even though we haven't seen Him directly. As we read in the first chapter, creation speaks of God's existence. Archaeology and history speak of the validity of the Word as well, therefore, we don't have blind faith. God has given us good reason that we can trust His Word. This is why it says in Hebrews, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:3). Yet today we have so few people who have faith because they deny that what is seen through creation was made out of what did not exist. People are having more faith in man's view of evolution than God's Word of truth. Jesus even warned us that, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). The account of creation was recorded by Moses and Jesus is telling us that if you can't have faith in that, you won't have faith in Jesus and His resurrection either. Do you have faith in God?

It was through faith that Abraham became the recipient of the promise wherein he would become the physical father of ancestors that would be numbered as the stars of heaven and the spiritual father of numbers that would fill the heavenly kingdom.

Verses 19-21 shows that Abraham was not delirious, but was cognitive of the fact that his body was too old to have children and that Sarah's womb was shut due to her age as well. Despite the scientific facts, he did not sway in unbelief but believed that God was bigger and greater than what could be seen and understood by man. He believed God was outside of our physical laws and that God would not lie.

At 100 years old (99 at the time of this promise) Abraham was strengthened in his faith by believing without seeing. The same is true of us today. When we exercise our faith, it becomes stronger and we are strengthened in that faith so that the direct result is to praise God and give Him glory. When one doesn't put his faith into practice, each trial becomes more difficult and we begin to rely more and more upon what is seen. The result is a dying faith leading to hopelessness and ungodliness that ends in judgment. Faith is also important because it validates the credibility of the person making the promise. As we read in John, "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son" (1 John 5:10-11) and, "The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful" (John 3:33). Our faith in God, gives Him glory.

Verse 22 continues to show that righteousness comes by faith and believing God despite what you do not understand. This was not only true for Abraham, but also for us today if we believe in God and His Son whom He raised from the dead. Verse 24 uses the future tense verb to show that God's grace will continue even beyond our present day. The Scriptures declare, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:9-10). Also, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him" (1 Thess 4:14-15). There is no scientific evidence to prove such a claim yet God does not lie. Do you have faith? After all, how do you know Jesus was born of the virgin Mary? What evidence do you have for that? We believe because it is in the Word of God and, likewise, we believe in the

resurrection because God said it was true. Though there is no proof of it, there is every reason to trust it. First, God's Word said it. Second, history supports these claims. Third, archaeology supports the Scriptures. The first reason alone, is enough for me to believe that Jesus was given over to death to atone for my sins, but God raised Him to life that, having been justified by His blood, I might live. That is the promise. Those are the facts. This is the source of righteousness. The only question is, do you believe that it may be credited to you as righteousness as it was to your father Abraham or is Abraham not your father?

Romans 5

5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Chapter five begins by taking for granted that proof has been given that salvation, or justification, comes by faith. Earlier chapters showed the Jew to glory in their ancestry from Abraham, but this chapter shows Jew and Gentile alike can glory only in Christ. Earlier chapters showed the doctrine of justification by faith but now we see the benefit that comes from this faith.

God is either your worst enemy if you are unrighteous and under his wrath or your best friend if you are righteous in faith. Even Abraham of whom Paul has been referring to was a friend to God, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend" (James 2:23). Likewise, in Christ we are God's friends, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:13-16).

When one has faith, they have peace with God because Jesus has taken the wrath of God upon Himself in your place and has satisfied the legal requirement for sin. Isaiah wrote, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes" (Isa 32:17-18). This is not an obscure teaching as we see the truth of God's wrath and His righteousness as deliverance throughout the Bible. The following is a small set of examples compared to what could be given:

- "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:3-6).
- "Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead-Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1:10).
- "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him" (1 Thess 5:9-11). Talk about peace!

- “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people” (Luke 21:23-24).
- “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:35-36).
- “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath. In the fire of His jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for He will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth” (Zeph 1:18).
- “Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (Prov 11:4).
- “The desire of the righteous ends only in good, but the hope of the wicked only in wrath” (Prov 11:23).
- “The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community” (Num 1:53).
- “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Yet God has delivered us from wrath and has given peace to those of faith:

- “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).
- “His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph 2:15-18).
- “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross”

Verse two shows us that we have not only gained peace with God, but we have access to grace. Aren’t they the same? No. God’s wrath remained on us because of our sin. When Jesus stepped in and took our punishment to satisfy the Judge’s requirement (death) for the sinner, we had peace knowing that our sentence had been taken away. However, where does that leave you? Now, because we are at peace with God, He has allowed us to enter His presence, shown by the curtain of the Temple being torn when Jesus died. Today we hear rumors about the Ark of the Covenant being in Ethiopia and how people who see it still die. Friends in Christ, because we are at peace with God, we now have access to His throne and that Ark will not kill you. That is one of the differences between the Old and New Covenants. In the Old Testament if you ran into the Most Holy Place of the Temple you would have been dead due to God’s wrath. Now that Jesus has opened up the way to His throne by giving us peace with God, we can enter God’s presence because of our holiness in Christ. Before sin remained upon us, and thus God’s wrath. Now, righteousness through Christ’s blood makes us holy. This is what we

read in Hebrews: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:19-23). We now have peace with God, but by His grace He gives us even more benefit. We can now stand in His presence peacefully and receive the added blessings of His protection, love, glory, teaching and guidance. Peter writes, “Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the *divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4). What a grace-filled blessing! Not only have we escaped God’s wrath but we receive His glory. Jesus said of His disciples to the Father, “Just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. *I have given them the glory that You gave Me*, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me” (John 17:21-23). Wow! God’s mercy and grace give us reason to “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” God has given us His glory, His divine nature since we are not at peace and delivered from God’s wrath.

The very fact that we can stand and not be tossed back and forth shows the confidence we can have in Christ. We can stand firm knowing that our sins are all covered and there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. We can be, “Confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).

Verse three moves from our hope and glory to our suffering. In Christ, even our suffering brings about added good. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen” (2 Cor 4:17-18).

When we suffer, our flesh is put into submission and as Peter said, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2). We should not run from tribulation because it is this very thing that brings us closer to God. Strangely enough, our suffering is a blessing. Suffering in the body produces perseverance and patience because we begin to live in the Spirit rather than the body. The patience develops a godly character within us that gives us encouragement and hope as we “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Heb 12:2). Job’s patience produced a godly character as God speaks about Job to the devil, “And he still maintains His integrity, though you incited Me against him to ruin him without any reason” (Job 2:3).

There is nothing better on earth than to be focused on our Lord and Savior as we wait patiently for His return. It is like a child who is waiting to open up a birthday present that has been sitting on the table for days. It is hard to have a bad day knowing your birthday is coming so soon. The excitement grows as each day draws closer to the actual event. In this same hope and excitement we wait for the Lord, enduring trials knowing that they lead only to the ultimate goal. Having our eyes fixed on Jesus we cast not a glance at the minor interruptions of the sufferings and trials occurring around us. What a

contrast we should be from the unrighteous man who portrays God has a hard taskmaster and is filled with whining and complaining. We would do well to remember Job's words to his wife, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble" (Job 2:10)?

Verse five promises that our hope will not disappoint us. This is a guarantee that we will receive what we promise. One hoping to receive something only to find out it isn't to be had, would be greatly disappointed. We need not worry for "In You our fathers put their trust; they trusted and You delivered them. They cried to You and were saved; in You they trusted and were not disappointed" (Ps 22:4-5). Our hope is sure and unlike the birthday boy who opens the present, only to find a temporal gift, we have been given the unfading and permanent Holy Spirit living within us (1 Cor 6:19; 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16).

It is the Spirit that gives us the love and spiritual drive that overwhelms us with joy. In fact, both love and joy are gifts of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Paul wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Cor 1:3-5). James also understood this truth, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-5). Clearly, these testings bring us more glory and honor in the end. In Thessalonians we read, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:5-7). There are many Scriptural examples of such joy. When Paul was being persecuted the Scriptures record, "They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:50-52). We read of the apostles, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41-42). Their situation seemed dire and depressive, however, the Holy Spirit overcomes our earthly conditions to put our focus back on heavenly hope. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:1-4). This must have been what Paul was focusing on when he was flogged: "After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:23-26). Who in their right mind could sing hymns and praise God after being flogged. Only someone filled with the Holy Spirit and His love and joy. Obviously, Paul's hope was not disappointing him!

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

At just the right time, Christ died for the world. Three things are important here: First that it was God's predetermined time, no later and no sooner. Second, man was powerless to help himself. Third, Jesus died for the entire world, past, present and future because all were and are ungodly. No matter if one was a Jew or Gentile, they fall into the ungodly category.

As we look at the timing of Christ's death we see that there were reasons for this divine appointment. When Jesus was at the wedding in Cana He said to His mother, "'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come'" (John 2:4). When Jesus upset the Pharisees the Scriptures record that, "No one seized Him, because His time had not yet come" (John 8:20). Galatians tells us, "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal 4:4-5).

So when was His time? "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' -which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?' . . . With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last" (Mark 15:34-37). Why the ninth hour? Because this was the ninth hour on the 14th day of the month of Nisan, the very day and very hour that the Passover lamb was to be killed. Jesus was our Passover Lamb. This festival was literally a "rehearsal" for thousands of years, leading up to this event. During the time of Jesus, on the tenth day of the first month of Nisan, the High Priest would walk from the temple mount out the city gate leaving behind him a long row of priests who would mark a trail from the city gate all the way to the Temple. Passover was one of the required feasts, meaning all Jews had to go to Jerusalem to celebrate it as God commanded. Meanwhile, the High Priest went outside the city and selected a lamb without blemish and would bring it to the gate. Once the lamb reached the gate, one of the priests would cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord" and everyone along the whole line would begin yelling out the same thing in unison. Now Jerusalem was literally bulging with people in every home and hotel. When they heard this cry, each one would grab their palm branches and run to the path already marked by the priests, and when the High Priest went by, they would cry out the same words and lay down their palm branches while the lamb was led up to the Temple Mount.

Let's examine this before moving on. Jesus, our High Priest and the Lamb of God, rode on a donkey on the tenth day of the first month, the very day the High Priest was doing the above mentioned. When Jesus reached the gate people began crying out the same phrase they repeated every year without fully understanding its true meaning (Mark 11:9). (Sounds like some churches I have been to). The Pharisees tried to get the disciples and the people to stop crying this out because it was ruining the "traditional" Passover ritual. Jesus replied by saying, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:39-40).

Next the lamb was to be taken and tied up on the temple mount to be examined for the next three days by every scribe and pharisee to make sure this lamb was without blemish. If it was, on the fourth day it was to become the Passover lamb, which was the 14th day of the first month. At 3:00 in the afternoon, the High Priest would say "I thirst" and was given a glass of wine to drink. He then would say, "It is finished" as he killed the lamb. This lamb had to be put in the oven before sundown without any of its bones being broken.

Where did Jesus go after His triumphant entry? To the temple mount where the lamb was to be taken (Mark 11:11). Like this lamb, Jesus was also examined by the scribes and pharisees for the next three days until, at the end of which, He was proclaimed to be “unblemished” by Pilate who said, “I find no basis for a charge against Him” (John 18:38). Jesus also cried out “I thirst” (John 19:29), and “It is finished” (John 19:30) before giving up His own life silently as a lamb is quiet before its shearers (Acts 8:38). And as on the Passover lamb, not a bone was broken (John 19:36).

Furthering this incredible fulfillment of God’s Passover, the High Priest would go into seclusion for the next three days not to be seen or touched by anyone. When these days were over he then went to offer the first fruit offering to God in the temple. Likewise, Jesus was in the secluded grave for three days, and upon rising, told Mary not to handle Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17). Just as the priest was to make the first fruit offering, Jesus was that offering, “So in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: *Christ, the first fruits*; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him” (1 Cor 15:22-23). Not only was Christ the First Fruit Himself but He also offered the believers to His father as first fruits as well. Revelation says, “They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4, see also James 1:18).

Obviously, without an understanding of the God given festivals the completeness and divine timing of Jesus, and prophecy itself, cannot be understood. Perhaps we should not call these the Jewish festivals because they were not just for the Jews. They only came to the Jew first, but now we have become engrafted branches (Rom 11:17). When a branch is grafted into another tree it doesn’t change the tree, the branch is changed. Are we trying to change the tree by ignoring the festivals of God?

Clearly, no single person could orchestrate such timing. This is one more evidence of Jesus being the Christ as the prophetic events of Passover were divinely fulfilled.

As for the recipients of the Passover Lamb, we read in Exodus: “An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land” (Ex 12:48-49). This Passover was available to the Gentiles even when it was first instituted. All who trusted in God and place the blood of the lamb above their doorframes would have the judgment of God pass over them. The same is true for us today. All are ungodly, and Jew and Gentile alike, need to trust in the Lord Jesus to cover their sins with His blood. Jesus came at just the right time as the Passover Lamb to fulfill what had been symbolized for centuries. John alluded to this when he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)!

Thirdly, we see that part of timing was when we were still powerless. Even here there is prophecy being fulfilled. In Genesis we read, “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His” (Gen 49:10). The Jews understood this was a prophecy about the coming Messiah and that when Judah had lost their power and authority in the land (scepter departing), the Messiah would come. Christ came at a time when the Romans ruled and Judah’s scepter had departed.

Another aspect of being powerless was not political, but spiritual. Man had no power to redeem himself. This was true of man throughout all of history after the fall. As

Paul has pointed out already in Romans, all had fallen short and were in desperate need of the Savior. Also, Christ came at a time when their need was great and their strength was sapped by the Roman rule. Moses said, “The LORD will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free” (Deut 32:36). Have you realized that you are powerless yet?

Verse seven also shows that Jesus death was not a normal everyday occurrence. Who in their right mind would give their life to save a man who was innocent but condemned as guilty? Our hearts might go out to him and we might shed a tear or two for this righteous man, but we wouldn’t take his place. Most men would not do such a thing. On the other hand, a good man who has treated others in kindness and generosity, might find someone who cared enough to step in to return the favor, but even then most men are not willing to give their lives. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). So few have this kind of love, yet Jesus would demonstrate a different kind of love.

God’s love was different because He loved us when we were not good, nor righteous, but rather sinners. Man had given nothing to God that God should repay him (Rom 11:35). In fact, man had done nothing but offend a holy and righteous God with his sin. Try and find a person who will die for someone who has offended them greatly, yet this is what Jesus did. God demonstrated His love which is unconditional. Christ’s death was also different in that it wasn’t just death, but taking upon our sins and becoming a literal curse for us as well (Gal 3:13). Whereas the few people who might die for someone else, often have God to look to for strength, Jesus was separated from God and knew this would happen before going to the cross.

We are to examine and learn from this kind of love and pass it on. John wrote, “We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21). Jesus was setting an example for us to follow both in words and action: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:43-44). Jesus has not asked us to do anything He Himself did not do. In fact, He has not asked us to do anything we cannot do by His strength: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). A good verse to tie in the timing and the love is found in John where we read, “It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love” (John 13:1). Now it is our time and our turn as Paul tell us, “And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor 5:15).

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What is the result of God's great love and sacrifice? The first part is our justification through a bloody death that was supposed to be ours. But what is interesting is that there is more benefit still. It seems as if most Christians think that justification and salvation is the whole sum of the Gospel, but this is not true. Verse nine tells us we have been made right with God and we have been spared His wrath. However, verse ten says that now that we have been saved from hell "how much more" are we saved through His life. What are we saved from if we are already justified by His blood?

To answer this question I am going to go into a rather lengthy answer. It is important to see the vast scope of this concept because I believe it is one of the most important truths in Scripture. After all, something that is listed as "how much more" than even justification ought to receive a few more pages of explanation.

Paul states, "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked" (2 Cor 5:1-3). If our tent blew down, our heavenly body would remain standing, therefore, I am not what you can see physically, my true eternal identity is what you can't see, my soul and spirit. In a sense, you can only see my house, not what is inside that house. Now let's look at what is inside these tents of ours. Jesus states, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers" (John 15:5-6). Note that we are IN Christ. For every verse that states that Christ is in us there are ten that say we are in Him. I know it doesn't FEEL like you are in Christ, but what does the Bible say? It doesn't matter how you feel, it matters what you ARE. If, as believers, we are in Christ and He is in heaven, we are, in as sense, in heaven right now! That is also what Scripture says, "Since, then, you have *been raised with Christ*, set your hearts on things above, *where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is *now hidden with Christ* in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. *Put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Col 3:1-5). Christ IS YOUR LIFE. Note also that you died! Romans tells us, "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-" (Rom 6:6). Your old self was killed and, therefore, cannot be resurrected. One might say God didn't change you, He exchanged you with His life. You died with Christ so that you could be made new; "to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23-24). You are now a righteous and holy being in Christ. Some people are uncomfortable saying that they are a saint because they know their sins. The difference is that Christ has forgiven those sins, nailing them to the cross: "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against [past tense] us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). True, we were born sinful. Being born was our ticket to hell. However, through Christ we can be born again and made new in Him. God does not operate or judge on a performance based system, even though we unrightfully do so ourselves. God looks at us and He sees a saint, even when we sin. We look at ourselves and see the sin and not the

saint because that's what the devil wants. He wants you to go by what you feel, not by what God says. He wants you to focus on you, not on what Christ has already done for you. I guess it is a matter of perspective. Does God want us to place our thoughts on us and live according to the flesh or place our thoughts on Him and live according to the Spirit?

Paul always writes his letters to the "saints" not the "sinners" of Ephesus or Corinth, etc.. (Rom 15:31,2 Cor 8:4, 9:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:26; Jude 1:3). Even in the Old Testament before the law was given (Rom 5:13), Job saw himself as blameless, upright and righteous: "let God weigh me in honest scales and He will know that I am blameless- (Job 31:6; see also 9:21). His friends kept telling him, "No, you are a sinner. Repent and be healed." Who did God say was right? "After the LORD had said these things to Job, He said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has' (Job 42:7). Job knew he was a blameless saint even though he sinned, because those sins were not counted against him, and they certainly didn't change his identity if those sins were forgiven. God fixed it so that your old self, inherited through Adam, died. If, when you were born again, the old self was still there, you would be like Siamese twins with one good and one bad. But as Jesus said, "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand [remember our bodies are our house]" (Mark 3:25). Ephesians tells us Christ, "chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph 1:4). Just as this single page would be pierced if I nailed this book to a wall, we were IN Christ before Creation, we were IN Him as we walked the road to Calvary, we were IN Him as He hung and died on the cross, and we were IN Him when He rose from the dead. We don't resurrect our old self, we leave it on the cross. Are you beginning to understand the "how much more" Paul is talking about in verse ten here in Romans? Paul put it so beautifully by saying, "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we, too, may live a *new life*. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly *also* be *united with Him in His resurrection*. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-" (Rom 6:4-6). Note the verb tenses in the above Romans passage. They are past tense. We are not called to crucify our old self because Christ already did it. Good thing because we couldn't do it ourselves anyway. We are His workmanship, "created" in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10).

I once read an analogy of an electric tool. We are like these tools. Without being plugged into the energy source (God) we become nothing but paperweights. Our identity is tied up in the energy source. Without the juice the tool loses its individuality. It is Christ's life in us that gives us our identity and personality. Some people think that we are to emulate the life of Christ. You can't! God doesn't even want you to try. God doesn't want to simply "help" YOU lead a better life, He wants to do it ALL for you. Likewise, God didn't "help" you get saved, He did it ALL for you. As Habakkuk said, we would be: "guilty men, whose own strength is their god" (Hab 1:11). Most everyone knows the poem "*Footprints*" which illustrates this "independent" attitude. As you recall, the poem goes through life showing how there were two sets of footprints in the sand until the times were tough and then there were only one. When asked why God left him alone, God said, "Oh, that was when I carried you." Though a beautiful poem, it isn't quite

theologically accurate. It implies that I can be independent and only need Christ to carry me when things get too tough for ME to handle. NO! Christ carries us through our entire life. Again, the passage are discussing in such length says, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life" (Rom 5:10)? So often we focus too much on the death of Christ in this verse, but that is a mistake. Don't get me wrong, that is important, but let us look closer at His life. His life through you saves you from bearing the burdens here on earth. Christ's death saved you from hell and His life saves you from hell on earth. Sometimes we make Jesus the focal point of our life, failing to make Him our LIFE. As the Bible clearly tells us, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:4). If God removed His life from this earth, we would all vanish. Somehow we think our flesh is our identity and we try to work independent from Jesus at times. We can't. No matter how hard WE try, WE can't stop sinning and become a "better" Christian.

I used to be a ladder day saint. No, I didn't misspell that word. You see, I used to try and climb the rungs of the ladder to get closer to God and I would look at my life and think, "when I stop saying bad words, then I will be a good Christian." Then it was, "when I stop losing my temper, then I will be a good Christian." I kept trying to work my way up the ladder. It wasn't until I began to realize that one doesn't get rid of sin to become a Christian, he becomes a Christian to get rid of sin, that I began to reap the benefits of being saved from Christ's life. I needed a heart transplant to understand this: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you *and move you to follow My decrees* and be careful to keep My laws" (Ezek 36:26-28). I could try all I wanted to climb the rungs but I was failing. I needed to realize that it was God's Spirit who moved me to obey, not my own fleshly motivations. It wasn't until I realized I was a saint and let God work through me that the Gospel of salvation began to change my heart, which in turn changed my actions. Before, I was trying to change my actions so that my heart would be changed. It didn't work that way. "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Rom 8:9). We were sinners saved by grace, and are now saints who have the capability to sin, but long to overcome it.

Bill Gillham, in his book *Lifetime Guarantee*, talks about the minds "green highway" in which our thoughts become entrenched into our brain. Once you think about something a line is formed in the brain. The more the same thought pattern is used the more the line becomes a trench. Eventually it turns into a path, a road, and finally a green (color of garbage) highway. If the road is not traveled the grass and weeds will begin to cover it up again. For example, the more one practices a foreign language the easier it becomes to recall information. However, if the road isn't traveled on, the information gets harder and harder to pull up. Eventually, if you don't use your foreign language for many years, those thought patterns almost disappear. The point of all this is that, as a saint that sins, one cannot expect to be good all the time, because the power of sin still resides in our flesh, but that doesn't change who you are. Just because our flesh is there does not mean one isn't capable of sinning less and less as we become closer to God and refuse to use those old green highways. James says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). We do have the capability to resist the evil

thoughts Satan puts in our mind because Christ is in us and we are in Him. Once a thought enters the brain we have a choice to respond or ignore it. Using Christ's strength we can ignore that thought. The more and more we resist these temptations, the more they dissipate. On the flip side, when things of God are put in our thoughts, those good highways become well traveled and lead to a joy filled life. This is why Paul wrote, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Every thought should be taken captive and analyzed to be sure it is in line with Christ-like obedience. If not, resist and ignore it. Again, we can't do this perfectly, however, as Scripture states, "Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men" (1 Tim 4:8-10). This type of training gives joy for this present life, but it is something we work at and can only obtain by using Christ's strength in us. However, to use it, one needs to recognize it is there. God wants more than our salvation, He wants us to reap the benefits of all the blessings He has to offer us on this side of heaven.

Eternal life is yours already. You are already seated with Christ in heaven, so act like it! We are what we think we are. Believe you are a saint as the Bible says and you will act like a saint. Think about it, does the law ever motivate you to do good? NO! I don't steal because I am afraid of getting caught. I don't steal because I love Jesus and I don't want to do anything that would displease Him: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor 5:14). Likewise, thinking you are a sinner and that you NEED to change won't motivate or give you the strength to become better. Paul shows us that the law KILLS, it doesn't build you up and give LIFE: "He has made us competent as ministers of a New Covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). Realizing you are a saint under the New Covenant, and your response to that tremendous gift will be your Gospel motivation and power to change. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Branches can never PRODUCE fruit, they can only BEAR fruit that is produced by the life of the VINE through them. That is also why we, as saints, are not under the law. Consider the following: · 1 Tim 1:9 "We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious." · 1 Cor 9:20 "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law." · Rom 7:6 "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." · Rom 6:14 "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." · Gal 5:18 "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." · Gal 3:12 "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, The man who does these things will live by them." · Rom 8:2-3 "Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." This is the

heart of the Gospel message. Not until we stray from Christ does the law need to be in the life of a saint.

Thinking as poor sinners, we love to beat ourselves with the law saying, "This is the third time I have done this," or "This sin is too big to be forgiven," and "I must change before the forgiveness becomes effective." How many times do we ask Christ to forgive us and then go away feeling guilty because we still FEEL that we are bad. That is like saying to Christ, "Thanks for the forgiveness, but I must do more in order to be forgiven. What You did wasn't good enough." Can you see the performance based grade report we give ourselves under the law? Can you see how we lessen the joy available to us in forgiveness? If I am good I FEEL like a saint and if I am bad I FEEL like a sinner, no matter what the Bible says. Again, feelings lie, the Bible does not. One of Satan's biggest tools is our feelings. If we operated all of our lives using feelings as our guide, where would we be? In contrast, think how joy filled we would be using Truth as our guide. The truth is - you a saint because of Christ!

Think about Lot. No matter how hard I try to find "saint-like" qualities in him, I can't, but 2 Peter 2:7 says he was righteous. I try to make him a saint based upon his performance and how I feel about him, but God declared him righteous based on truth (note this was before the law was given, which is the same as after the law was taken away in the New Covenant). We want to live under Moses, but if we do we will die: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Only God's grace can change a person to be obedient to God's law. You see we are under the "law of love, written in our hearts" (Hebrews 10:16). Law, motivated by love, is Gospel because righteous acts done out of love are actually done through you by Christ Himself.

Have you ever wondered why we have both the body and blood of Christ in communion? It was in Christ's body that we were crucified and then reborn according to Romans: "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God" (Rom 7:4). Through the body of Christ we died to the law and became saints. Hebrews states, "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). We have been made holy in our Spirit-body (our true identity) through the body of Jesus. What was His blood for? Forgiveness! It is through the necessary shedding of the blood of Christ that we were forgiven, but it was His body that exchanged our identity from sinner to saint: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Remember the testimony of Jesus's words about the Temple, "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man'" (Mark 14:58). What was Jesus talking about? His body! After three days God raised up the Temple of God, Jesus Christ. Understanding that we are IN Christ, that third day resurrection also made us new as well. We are the new Holy of Holies of which Jesus spoke. In the Old Testament the Jews were forgiven when the high priest went behind the veil into the Holy of Holies of the Temple. If the sinners themselves would have gone behind that veil they would have perished. However, when Christ died that veil was torn in half, allowing free passage into the Holy of Holies. Because of our new identity we are holy and can enter into God's presence. We read in the words of Paul, "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple [same word for Holy

of Holies] of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people'" (2 Cor 6:16). How can this be? Because we are not only forgiven through Christ's blood, we are also made new through Christ's body. This is also why at Christ's return it is our bodies that are changed, not our spirit or soul (I Cor 15:51-53). Again, our identity is not the body, but the soul and spirit. When we eject from our body, Satan can no longer give us a hard time because our sin is in our body (our building WE live in).

How does repentance fit into all of this? Repentance is mandatory for regeneration. One must want to be changed into a new creation before God will do it. If you love your life, chances are you will not repent because there will be no motivation for change. "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). As Scofield once said, "Repentance is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith implies that change of mind which is called repentance." There are many Scripture passages which show that repentance was a forerunner to faith. John the Baptist was preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mat 3:2). John knew Jesus was coming and, therefore, he was sent to be a "voice calling in the wilderness" to "prepare the way" for Christ (Mark 1:3). As Jesus began His earthly ministry Matthew states, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Mat 4:17). Jesus knew that, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor 7:10). Peter, as well, preached to the Jews saying, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19; see also Acts 17:30). Repentance is a big step because often times it means swallowing pride, and worse yet, admitting you are not lord of your ring.

The first step in a joy filled life with Christ is to abandon YOUR life and cling to Jesus as LIFE. We read in Colossians, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:1-4). The key is to surrender your life for His: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it" (Luke 9:24). Maybe some of you are still thinking, "if we don't have the law what is to keep people from going crazy with sin under the Gospel?" Scripture answers that one as well: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! [Why?] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" [note, slaves are controlled by their master] (Rom 6:15,17-18 NAS). Paul also asks an important question in the book of Galatians, "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard" (Gal 3:2)? What is your answer? By believing right? You received the Spirit by faith alone. Verse three then goes on, "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort" (Gal 3:3)? Do we now then try to add to our faith, good works through the law? Never! We are not under the law. You cannot try to live out your sainthood by yourself, you must just believe what Christ says and act like it.

To find the meaning of anything we go to its origin. For example, if I wanted to know what "gay" meant, I could look it up in a dictionary and find out that that word originally meant happy. Today, because of sin, gay now means homosexual. So let's look at the true meaning of sin by going to its origin. Sin first appears in Genesis when God warns Cain about sin: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7). God has shown us Satan's secret. Sin is a noun with personality and purpose. Sin is a power that can give Cain thoughts and suggestions, even making Cain think that these thoughts originated with himself (Satan's biggest trick). You see, God dwells within your spirit (1 Cor 6:17), but sin dwells within your body (Rom 7:23). When we talk about sin, it is important to differentiate between sin as a noun (hamartia), and sin as a verb (hamartano). I am not supporting the false idea that one can say "the devil made me do it," however, I am saying that we have the power to say "NO" to sin with consistency, though never perfection. To blame sin on the "old man" within me promotes denial and flies in the face of what Romans 6 clearly tells us. To say the "sinful nature" in me causes me to sin suggests that it is normal for a Christian to sin several times a day, sometimes even overtly. This lie comes from the devil, the father of lies, and his secret is exposed when we examine the Scriptures further. We will see that sin is a power as Genesis showed us. As I have been pointing out, our "old self" was crucified, killed, done away with, and never to be raised up again (Rom 6:6). Satan can't raise him up and God won't. What I am about to say is going to shock some of you, but please read on and I will show you that Scripture says it, not me. Christians (not unbelievers) have only one nature, a divine one, not a sinful one. "Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet 1:4). I know we feel like we have a sinful nature, but that is Satan's successful secret. Through the power of the Spirit I pray that secret will be exposed in the following paragraphs. Many of you may be thinking of Romans 7:18 which reads, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." The Hebrew word used for "sinful nature" is sarx. The NIV translation of the Bible took the liberty of translating that word as "sinful nature," 23 of the 151 times it is used. Only the NIV did this. All other translations translate it as flesh or body. The point is, "sinful nature" just isn't there. What is the difference between nature and flesh? A pig's nature is to wallow in the mud, it really can't help itself. To say we have a sinful nature means we can't help ourselves. To say we have sinful flesh shows us there is sin in us but we don't have to follow its leading.

People often use Romans 7 to show that man has two natures, however, look closely and you will see men [Christians] only have one nature, a good one. Is Paul happy about failing on his good intentions? Does part of him find delight in his screw up? NO! Paul longs to do good and hates the sin (noun) within him. There are two characters represented in Romans; Paul, and sin. That is why he says, "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me" (Rom 7:17). He goes on in the next verse to tell us that the power of sin lives in his flesh, though sin is not Paul's identity. Satan loves to get you to think YOU are the one who comes up with these sinful ideas and YOU are responsible for the memory traces within your brain. The fact is, however, SIN is crouching at the door and desires to have you FEEL that YOU screwed up and, if

possible, FEEL guilty and unforgiven, even FEEL you have no choice in following your "nature." In Romans chapters 5-8 the word "sin" appears 41 times and only in one case is it translated as a verb (hamartano) in 6:14: "For sin (noun) shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin (verb) because we are not under law but under grace? By no means" (Rom 6:14-15)! To understand our victory in Christ, one needs to understand sin as a power, or as a noun. Therefore, SIN offers thoughts to your flesh for you to consider. SIN then deceives you by making you think these are YOUR thoughts. Only when you act upon those thoughts do you become accountable. That is Satan's greatest tool against the saints. Go back and read through Romans 5-8 (in any translation other than NIV) and try and find a place that shows that the old man is still alive. It isn't there because our old self was crucified with Jesus on the cross.

If the sinful nature is non-existent in a Christian's life, who is our battle with? Paul writes, "I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members" (Rom 7:23). Here we see our enemy is identified as the "law" or the power of sin. Also, this enemy is not living in my mind where thoughts are generated, but in my body. Therefore, our mind is at war against this evil power of sin that God identified back in Genesis 4. Why is your mind against this power? Because God has written His law in our mind: "I will put My laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds" (Heb 10:16). You see, your mind wants to obey God and, therefore, the evil power in your body battles against the law of God in your mind (Rom 7:23). "For who has known the mind of the Lord that He may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). Our mind is the good guy, and there is not a battle of a good you and a bad you going on, rather a battle of the good you and the evil power of sin (noun) within your body. One might say you have a bad roommate that you can't get rid of. Does this mean the roommate can MAKE you do things you do not want to do? NO! That is why you have no sinful nature, but sinful flesh. How can we apply this knowledge to our lives? When the power of sin presents a thought to your mind, the trick is to take that thought captive and reject those that are not in line with Godly things: "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). You see, you are not dead to sinning, you are only dead to the power of sin over you. That is why Paul said, "sin (noun) shall not be your master" (Rom 6:14). Sin can't control you because you have the mind of Christ.

Thinking like a saint does not come naturally, one must train themselves to think that way. This is the first step to godly living. Hebrews states, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Heb 5:14). Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice, have trained themselves to discern good and evil. You simply need to understand and begin acting and practice living like a saint. Christ will overcome the power of sin through you, for you. Simply put, we cannot make promises ourselves because we do not have the strength to do so. We need to promise by saying, "Lord, by Your grace alone, I know You can keep my promise through me." But by being trained to think and act like HE is working through us, the power of sin is subdued. Satan is the accuser. He gives you thoughts and then accuses you of originating them. Those thoughts are not yours unless you take them. The more we practice and train ourselves to see Christ in us as saints, the easier it becomes

and the more joy-filled our life will be: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:9). CAUTION! If you think that now you will keep an eye out for these lies of Satan, "take heed, lest ye fall." Satan wants you to do that. This is putting the cart before the horse. The Bible clearly tells us "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6). If we set our mind to be tuned into sin-filled ideas of sin, Satan has you already defeated. Instead, if you set your mind on things above, sin (noun) is faced with the challenge of getting through those Godly thoughts to deliver his thoughts. The more we are trained to think in godly ways and put Christ into every part of our life. . music, entertainment, work, family, etc., the more Satan's thoughts will stick out like a sore thumb. Then you can take that thought captive, reject it, and stay on track with Christ. Again, to say we have a sinful nature gives us an excuse to sin, but the Bible does not support that. Paul put it beautifully when he said, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:11-14). Now put this Scripture to practice.

All true knowledge is the outgrowth of obedience. Everything else is just information, if not acted upon. As long as we are on a role of challenging your normal thought process, why don't we ask you the question of where the New Testament begins? Do you realize that Jesus' ministry took place under the LAW, not grace? Jesus came to bring a New Covenant of grace, but His ministry only led up to it, it wasn't under it. Therefore, the four gospels are technically under law, or Old Covenant times. Pentecost will usher in the New Testament era in Acts 2 (One could argue it comes in at the cross when the blood of the New Covenant is shed). This is vital in properly understanding many portions of Scripture as recorded in the gospels. I do believe the Bible is inspired in its entirety. However, we must also remember that things like chapter breaks and verse numberings are not inspired. Likewise, the Old/New Testament break is also man made. Luke records Jesus' words, "In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you'" (Luke 22:20). The word "covenant" and "testament" are the same Hebrew word, and therefore, Jesus tells us when the New Covenant would begin -- with the pouring out of His blood. The New Covenant could not have stood under the law any more than Moses's basket could have stayed afloat under the law. When Jesus began His ministry He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mat 4:17). Note that He said it was "near" not "here." God's Holy Spirit, which gives faith, had not yet been poured out upon the earth. Many people would give almost anything to have the chance to go back and walk with Christ as the disciples did. Let me tell you, this is nothing to wish for, because you would have been just as blind as they were without the outpouring of the Spirit. We now live in an era much greater than the disciples, and I believe that Scripture will also show this. To illustrate that Jesus' ministry was under the law, I would like to point out only a small portion of many examples. You can read the gospels and find the rest yourself, however, do not take me as saying that the gospels are not important. They are just as important as the rest of the law and prophets that testify of Christ. They also have grace mixed with

their law. However, once the gospels are over, the New Covenant is ushered in and grace abounds. Let us compare Matthew, who recorded Jesus' words, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mat 6:14-15). Do you see how Christ's ministry was under law? Does this sound like the Gospel you learned about: If you forgive, Christ's death is effective, if not, it isn't either? Now look what happens after the New Covenant is ushered in, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful [flesh, sarx], God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). Now we are forgiven by faith, not by our performance.

The Bible isn't contradicting itself here, it simply is recording history under two types of covenants. Jesus' entire ministry was trying to bring people to repentance and leave them no place to look but the cross. He was showing them over and over that the law was death for them, and there was no way out except the cross. Look at Matthew 15 when Jesus talked to the Gentile woman and refused to give her gospel (at first): "He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs'" (Mat 15:26). Would any of us say that to someone who was willing to receive Christ today? During Old Covenant times, the gospel was for the Jews only. That is why Christ came, to open the doors for all believers, but that time had not yet come here in Matthew. In Matthew 5 we read, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mat 5:6). To be righteous means to be perfect. Once we go past Pentecost we then read, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). In the very next verse of Matthew we read, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Mat 5:7). Again, if I don't show mercy to someone, I, myself, will not be given mercy. I sure hope that I have shown enough to receive enough! But what happens after Pentecost: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). Praise God that He gave us mercy without any merit of our own. Matthew continues, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mat 5:9). But Galatians shows we are already sons of God, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). Finally, Matthew culminates the point of his message by saying, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Mat 5:20-22). Note the present tense form of those verbs. Now who could stand under that? Jesus was simply leading them up to the point where He could show the people their utter despair, and their need for Him. Later Jesus would throw them a life-raft in the words, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). This sermon on the mount was not for us today, it was for those people under the Old Covenant. That is why Jesus said, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it

while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Mat 5:25-26). People, Jesus wasn't talking about civil court matters here, that Judge was Christ. Jesus clearly showed them that the only way to heaven under their current system was to, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat 5:48). They must have walked away from that sermon wondering if there was any hope. To be perfect meant to be blameless. God provided that hope on the cross and then stated, "We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col 1:28).

This does not mean that the law is bad, and, that it has no purpose today for unbelievers and those that stray. As Timothy states, "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels" (1 Tim 1:8-9). Hebrews tells us the law is written in our minds (Heb 10:16). But what is that for us as Christians? Romans tell us, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:8-10). Jesus said there were two main laws: 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. Then He said, "All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mat 22:40). Today, we are under the law of love. I realize what a hard topic this can be to understand, especially with so many traditions that we have grown up with. This is why we must go to the Scriptures and see how they measure up to this truth. I know Christ does not want us to be putting our focus on us, but rather on Him and what He has done for us. I find it defeating to look at myself and say what an awful person I am. Isn't that a slap in the face of Christ? He died to free you from that. That knowledge has made me love Him so much more because it was the sick who need a doctor and Jesus was my doctor. The man who has been forgiven much will love much and I now see how much Christ forgave me and renewed me. We don't sin and hope Christ will forgive us, we claim that forgiveness in our lives knowing it was effective, once for all who will believe on Him. Keep in mind this message is only for Christians. If you are not a believer in Christ, you are an awful sin-filled sinner. This is why you need Christ. Only in Christ is can you be made clean. Only in Christ are you justified and made a saint of God. I pray that this truth has touched you in a special way as I believe it is the foundation of Christianity. May God bless you and keep you in His love and may you be ever giving thanks that you are a saint.

Finally, verse 11 in our text at hand concludes by saying, "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Not only is the truth of our life in Christ a sure thing, but understanding this should cause us to rejoice because it is through Christ we have been made right with God and we can now participate in this divine nature. Praise be to God!

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned- 13 for before

the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

The first part of chapter five has shown us the benefits of God's grace. These verses now turn to show how this grace came to be needed and reveals that the grace far outweighs the consequences of sin. Many people miss this, however, and try to use these verses to form a man-made doctrine, as we will discuss.

One of the biggest problems for those Christians who try and believe in millions of years and add it to the Bible is this opening verse and others like it. According to verse 12 death entered this world through the sin of Adam. Those holding to millions of years have death on earth long before the supposed existence of humans. This leaves death as meaningless and purposeless and, thus, Christ's death as meaningless as well. If there was death before Adam Jesus could have forgiven us without dying on the cross. Instead, as Hebrews 9:22 tells us, forgiveness could not come about without the shedding of blood, or having bloodshed with purpose. Death was the curse of sin but the cure for it as well, through Jesus.

Old earth Christians try to reconcile this verse by saying that animals could die before humans were on earth and this verse only refers to man dying, not animals. If "death came to all *men*" perhaps animals could die before this fall into sin since it doesn't read "death came to all men and animals." The problem with this is that in twisting this verse to fit their man-made doctrine, many other verses are contradicted in holding to that belief. First of all, one must realize that God is writing this for man, not the animals. This text is written for those who have reason and a relationship with the Lord. Secondly, when one reads Genesis 3:14-19 we see that all of creation was cursed, even the ground. This is supported by the New Testament which reads, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom 8:19-22).

Others try to say that the death being spoken of here in verse 12 is only spiritual death that came upon man, not physical death. Again we have a contradiction with other Scriptures then. If what they are saying is true and man only died spiritually then why do we read in Corinthians, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:21-22). If these compromisers are right there is not a physical resurrection because God is making a comparison to support the resurrection of the dead by saying that just as through Adam came spiritual death, so also through Christ comes the spiritual resurrection as well. No! Obviously God is saying just as Adam brought physical death, Jesus brings life and a physical resurrection. Jesus even rebuked the Sadducees for not believing in the physical resurrection (That is why they were so sad-you-see). There is no way to say that Romans 5:12 was talking only about spiritual death and keep the rest of the Bible consistent.

All have sinned and are in need of forgiveness. Some will say this doesn't apply to animals because they don't sin. Again, you still have the above problem plus the fact that Genesis and Romans makes it clear that the creation was subjected to frustration and decay because of man's sin. In some way, if it wasn't for Adam and Eve sinning, we would live in perfect harmony today ourselves but we don't because we inherited Adam's sin just as much as the rest of creation inherited its corruption.

Verse 14 shows that before the law was given to Moses, all men were sinning, but the sin wasn't treated in the same way as it was after the law. There were different consequences, however, the one consequence that stayed the same was death. Even those who sinned before there was a list of laws died because of sin. I would say God considers sin pretty sinful wouldn't you?

Another aspect of verse 14 is that sin cannot be taken into account or one cannot be found guilty if there isn't a written code to break. I believe Paul brings this up to answer any argument that might arise from the previous chapters. Someone could easily argue that all could not be sinners is they didn't know they were sinning. Paul answers this by showing that even without the written law, there was a law written on their hearts and disobedience to that still resulted in deserving death. It is the same for us today. We often view the Old Testament as all being under the Mosaic Law but nothing is further from the truth. Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. Romans has been showing us that the same is true today. The rules for religion were the same in the days of Adam, Noah and Abraham as they are for us today. It was only in the short period from Moses to Christ that the written law was given and brought a whole new era of consequences and failures. The purpose of this period of time was to foreshadow Christ who would redeem us from sin, both those sins coming from breaking the law of Moses and those breaking the law in our hearts as Adam did. Jesus didn't just free us from the Mosaic law but also from the curse of the first man, Adam. In other words, we live in a time today, much like the days of Adam and Abraham. These men had a relationship with God and were not bound by a list of do's and don'ts that Moses had. We are not bound by the written code anymore, but we live in the Spirit, yet there is an unwritten code that comes about with our relationship with Christ where we want to obey and please our Creator, Savior and Friend. Apart from this relationship, there is no redemption from death. In fact, the death that reigned from the days of Adam to Moses is further proof that all men have sinned even without a written code to sin against. These men didn't transgress any laws, but were guilty by association with Adam who has passed down to natural man, a sin-filled flesh that makes us guilty without a written code to break. This is why flesh and blood cannot be in God's presence and at the resurrection we will receive new physical bodies (1 Cor 15). We do not receive new spirits or souls, only new non-corruptible bodies free from what was inherited by Adam. This corrupted flesh could not remain in God's presence and Adam was kicked out of the Garden and the throne of God. Likewise, we too were expelled from God's presence and can only have access to His throne through Christ today.

There are many comparisons that can be made between Adam and Christ. Adam didn't break any of the written commands that Moses had but he still died. He was a pattern of the One to come. Jesus didn't break any commands written or otherwise, yet He took the curse that was placed upon all men, animals, plants, heavens and earth by Adam, and placed it upon Himself so that we and *all* of His creation might be delivered

from our bondage to decay. In other words, just as Adams disobedience affects every single person of mankind, God's obedience through Christ affects every single person of mankind.

In Genesis 5:1-2 we read, "When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, He called *them* "man". Literally, the Hebrew reads, "He called them Adam." This again shows that all humankind would be modeled after the first Adam in their nature. Jesus, was the second Adam to represent not just natural man, but spiritual man: "So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second Man from heaven" (1 Cor 15:45-48).

An interesting parallel can also be made with the curse of Adam and Christ. We read, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). We read in Genesis that as a result of eating from the tree, Adam was cursed with pain, thorns, sweat and death. Christ himself hung on a tree (Gal 3:13) taking us back to the Fall. He suffered pain (Heb 5:7; Ps 22), wore a crown of thorns (Mark 15:17), sweat blood (Luke 22:44), and died for us, but more than that, He rose from the dead. He indeed became the very curse of man in order to redeem us from this curse through His death and resurrection, so that there would be no more pain (Rev 21:4; 22:3). Praise God! It is true that the price of the curse has been paid, but it will not be completely delivered until the end of the world (2 Peter 3:10). We read, "But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet 3:13; see also Rev 21:1; 20:11). Therefore, the results of the gift from Jesus are eternal and far greater than the temporal consequences of Adam as will be elaborated upon in the following verses.

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Now that Paul has shown that all men have sinned and death has come about to all men because of sin, he is about to reveal the extent of God's grace and the grandness of God's gift. In essence, we are gaining much more through Christ than we lost through Adam.

Verse 15 again reiterates the power of sin and that many had died by the sin of just one man. That phrase in itself displays the power involved with sin and is amazing

when one stops to think about. However, how much more powerful and amazing is the One who could conquer death and provide the gift of resurrection from the grips of death.

Verse 16 emphasizes again that the gift is not like Adam's inherited sin. When Adam fell, judgment followed with death reigning over condemned man. If one sin could do that, can you imagine the judgment and condemnation many sins would have? That is the superior effect of the gift because it justified men from not just Adam's sin but the uncountable sins of all history past, present and future. "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-15). Here we see that all our sins have been nailed to the cross two-thousand years ago. Praise God for this gift.

Verse 16 uses the word "many" rather than "all" simply to make a comparison to the "one." The intention is made clear in verse 18 where he defines the many as being all. As we read in Hebrews, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). Also, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Following the theme of earlier chapters, Paul is also making the argument that death came upon all men, Jew and Gentile alike. Likewise, it stands to reason that the gift will also apply to both Jew and Gentile alike.

Verse 17 repeats the affects of this amazing gift once more. Death reigned through Adam, yet through Christ, those who receive God's abundant provision of grace will reign in life, which is far greater than reigning in death. In addition to God's grace, righteousness is given. In other words, we not only stand forgiven but we also reign victoriously through Christ. Being justified brings forth a new life. It is one thing to be alive but it is another to reign in that life. God's mercy brought forth forgiveness and righteousness but his grace raised us up to take hold of that life and live abundantly now and eternally. While on earth Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

What does this abundant life entail? In Revelation we read, "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father-to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (Rev 1:5-6). Jesus has freed us and has now allowed us to be a kingdom of priests to serve this loving God. Some do not see serving as a good thing but that is because they have not experienced Christ's love. Frankly, there is nothing better than to serve someone you love here on earth. The feeling is wonderful, yet this pales in comparison to what joy this heavenly service will bring. As Revelation continues to tell us, we will reign and rule with this service, "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth'" (Rev 5:9-10; see also 2 Tim 2:12). I believe this service and priesthood is best described in Corinthians where we read, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor 5:13-15).

Verses 18 and 19 continue to compare the gift with the trespass. Whereas sin was passed on to all men, the gift is available for all men as well. Not all will accept the gift, yet all have access to it. Likewise, it was disobedience that brought about sin, yet obedience that brings righteousness. However, it wasn't man's obedience but the obedience of the One man, Jesus Christ. As the Scriptures testify, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). This is part of the great gift in that Jesus obeyed in our stead because we could not do it and we were not right. Now, however, we are right with God and are called righteous because of the obedience of the Christ.

There is an interesting change in verb tenses here as well. Just as in Adam all *were made* sinners, so in Christ all *shall be* made alive. The trespass brought temporal condemnation for those who believe on Jesus, yet the gift is eternal and everlasting.

It must also be noted that the power of sin and death did not reign over Jesus as He said of His life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18). Christ voluntarily gave His life to be our scapegoat. He had the power to give this life because He was the only one not affected by the trespass until he willingly infected himself with the trespass of all of us. However, it must be remembered that only those who believe on Him have the consequences of the trespass removed from them. As we read in John, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If death was in the world because of sin, why was there a need for the law to be added then? Verse 20 tells us that it was so that the transgressions might be increased so that man would recognize how sinful he really was. This way, God's grace might also be seen in its abundance as well. The commandments didn't cause the sin, they merely revealed them to man. The sin was there and man needed to face them in order to see his need for the Savior.

Verse 21 shows that as the single sin of Adam affected all of creation in the power and dominion of death, so God's grace would reign in all of creation through the righteous fulfillment of that law in Jesus Christ. The sweet joy of being given a cure for a disease won't be understood unless one first truly believes he has the disease. The law showed us our disease and Christ offers the cure.

Romans 6

6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in

order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

A natural response might be to say that if sin causes grace to increase, let us keep on sinning. Foreseeing this argument, the Holy Spirit answers this response with a sure NO! In Adam we died in the body, but in Christ we die to sin, therefore, we do not live in that same bondage brought about by Adam any more.

Verse three explains this reasoning by addressing any possible ignorance one might have as new believers. Those who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into His death. So what happens in baptism? You die. Many view baptism as new life, however, the Scriptures make it clear that through baptism by itself, you die. It is your faith in Christ that gives you life. When we are baptized our flesh and blood, like Christ, were buried into death. However, just as Christ was raised from the dead, so too, we are raised from this death into a new life through the glory of God of the Father. It is a supernatural event that is a result of God's power. Colossians makes this same point: "having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col 2:12). Note that baptism buries us, faith raises us up and both are done by the power of God, not any strength of our own.

The point Paul is making here, however, is that we shall not go on sinning because the power of God working in baptism has buried the old man inherited from Adam. By the power of God as well, you have weren't left in the grave but were raised with Christ through your faith. You are now a new man and we should no longer live in bondage to sin as inherited from Adam. Praise Jesus for this gracious gift of life! Colossians makes this clear again: "Since, then, *you have been raised with Christ*, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For *you died*, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature*: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming" (Col 3:1-6). Ephesians also testifies: "And *God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms* in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6-7). Wow! We have not only been given new life but we are now seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? That is what the Scriptures say but do we truly believe those words? We would do well to hear them so that sin would no longer reign in our lives.

Does this mean a Christian will not sin? Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that any "sin" we do is already forgiven and not counted against us. No, in the sense that we will break the commands of God in the flesh. Yes, in the sense that we no longer will want to do that which we should not do. No, in the sense that the flesh will take us down that road as Paul said, "that which I do not want to do, this I keep on doing." However, the flesh is continually sanctified through Christ, that is, we are being made more holy each and every day we are drawn closer to Jesus. The more we live in the Spirit the less power the flesh has over us. When Christ raised us up, He gave us His Spirit as a deposit (Eph 1:14), and resource that we might live in His power if we so choose. Paul later writes in Romans: "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit

you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship” (Rom 8:13-15). Also, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal 5:16-17), “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). The death that we received was the removal of the chains of bondage to death left by Adam. We had no power to overcome the curse. Through the resurrection brought about by Christ, however, we now have His Spirit within us, giving us His life that overcomes our flesh. Prior to this new life, there was no hope or way out of this dismal flesh.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

We were united with Christ in His death through baptism according to the preceding verses. It stands to reason that we will also be united in His resurrection through faith as well.

Verses six and seven expand on the act of baptism and being united with Christ in His crucifixion. It was our old self or nature that was crucified so that the sinful flesh might be buried and we should no longer have any choice in the matter of sin. Just as when one dies, he can no longer sin, so too, when we died to the flesh, we are free from its bondage and can live in the spirit. Verse seven literally reads that he who dies is “justified” from sin. Death was the fine for sin and death pays the fine. Christ took the penalty for us, therefore, we are now freed from the consequences of sin through not just dying with Christ but rising with Him and overcoming the curse. So why must we still die physically? First, because our bodies are still corrupted by the curse and they cannot enter into God’s holiness. We must receive new bodies for our same spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven. Secondly, we now are only receiving in part the glory that will be revealed in us. Paul discusses this in Corinthians, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’* The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:51-57).

Verse eight continues the same theme comparing the death and resurrection of Christ, to our own death and resurrection spiritually. Christ came to die once and to conquer death for us. To do so, our sins had to be placed upon Jesus as we read, “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). Also, “God made Him who had

no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Since death was defeated through the resurrection, it no longer has any power over Jesus. In Revelation we read, “I am the Living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18). Clearly Jesus holds the authority now. Therefore, Christ is now the essence of life and He gives us that life. As we saw earlier, “For *you died*, and *your life* is now hidden *with Christ* in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:3-4). Just as Christ lives for God’s glory and purpose, so we too now live for God’s glory and purpose. Sin has nothing to do with God’s glory and, therefore, how can we live in sin anymore?

There is a future tense form of the verbs describing our life. This simply goes to contrast the past tense verbs showing our unity in death and does not imply that we do not yet have this life. However, though we see and understand now in part, no doubt the future will bring clarity and fullness to these verses: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

As Christ cannot die again because He has mastered death, we too can say that sin has no more power over us because we have been raised with Christ.

Verse 12 shows us there is a choice involved here. We are not to let sin reign in our bodies in order to obey its evil desires. God did not take away our free will in our resurrection, rather He has given us His Spirit to overcome the flesh if we choose. This truth is echoed in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24). We see the same in Colossians, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col 3:9-11).

Verse 13 continues with a warning to not allow sin to reign in our flesh. For this is indeed where it lives, not in our spirit. Instead, we can choose to offer our fleshly bodies to God in thanksgiving for what He has done in raising us up. In so doing, we can use His power to use our flesh for his glory rather than for wickedness. This is what James was talking about when he said, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you” (James 4:7-8). We can resist sin. Being tempted by sin isn’t the same as accepting the devils wiles and using them as tools for wickedness. Sin isn’t yours until acted upon. Matthew Henry states the following:

It might be objected that we cannot conquer and subdue sin, it is unavoidably too hard for us: "No," says he, "you wrestle with an enemy that may be dealt with and subdued, if you will but keep your ground and stand to your arms; it is an enemy that is already foiled and baffled; there is strength laid up in the covenant of grace for your assistance, if you will but use it. Sin shall not have dominion." God's promises to us are more powerful and effectual for the mortifying of sin than our promises to God. Sin may struggle in a believer, and may create him a great deal of trouble, but it shall not have dominion; it may vex him, but shall not rule over him. For we are not under the law, but under grace, not under the law of sin and death, but under the law of the spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus: we are actuated by other principles than we have been: new lords, new laws. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

Verse 14 closes by reiterating that we have a choice. The power of sin is still there, however, you are no longer a slave to it because you are not under that law anymore as discussed in the beginning of this commentary (The law is still there, it just no longer rules the lives nor condemns those in Christ). Again we see that the power of sin comes from the law (1 Cor 15:56) which gives us a list of things to show us our transgressions. Christ fulfilled that list so the *power* of that law is finished in His grace. Finished once and for all as Hebrews tells us, "Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (Heb 9:25-28). This verse also helps answer the question posed earlier as to why we must die. Christ came the first time to bear our sin and give us a way out. It won't be until He returns that the full extent of this salvation will be realized when he takes all dominion away from satan and makes a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Paul has shown that we don't sin just to increase grace and now he addresses the fact that we don't sin because we aren't under the law. After all, if Adam wasn't under

the law and Christ has taken the punishment for the curse and the law, we ought to be free to do what we wish shouldn't we? "By no means" is the answer.

Verse 16 explains submission is the reason why. When you decide to become a slave to someone, you are deciding to obey and submit to your owner. If you decide to be a slave to the master of sin you will die, but if you decide to obey God (even though you will fail Christ did it for you) you will become righteous. But how do we do such a thing?

Verse 17 shows that God gets all the glory for this even being a possibility. It is true that we used to be slaves to sin and death but when we believe the teaching of Christ (called faith) we are set free from the chains of darkness, sin and the devil. We then become slaves to righteousness, meaning we choose to obey God's law to the best of our ability. As I said, you won't be able to keep it, yet we know that it has been kept for us by Jesus. The point being, however, we "offer ourselves" to obey Christ as a slave. The Gospel is not only something to believe but something to obey as well. We no longer should have a will to sin and please ourselves because we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ. We give thanks to God and obey him because He is our Master, not sin and the law. We choose to submit to our Creator and gracious Savior. Submitting to the law is submitting to sin, death and hopelessness. Submitting to Christ is submitting to grace and righteousness by serving Him rather than ourselves. Everyone falls into one of these categories. This is explained simply in Peter, "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity-for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Peter 2:18-20). Either we serve God or sin. Who is your master?

Another point made in verse 17 is the expression "form" of teaching. The word there implies a mould showing us that the Gospel is a teaching that shapes you and moulds you into righteousness. It is a teaching that changes you into what God would have you to be; in His image. It also implies that we are willing to be shaped and deny ourselves. We no longer live as if we have control of who we are but are truly slaves to God, allowing Him to use and shape us how He sees fit. We entrust ourselves to Him knowing what He is shaping us into is far better than what we could even imagine.

We must remember that being under grace doesn't nullify the law. The law is an expression of who Christ is in His very essence. Therefore being under grace means we obey the law but not because of the law. We obey because of two reasons: 1) Christ obeyed for us 2) Being like Christ we now follow the law of Christ which is what all the laws pointed to. This is why we are slaves to righteousness. You can't help but obey the law because that law is now the very essence of who you are in Christ. We no longer strive to reach the law, we live in Christ who is the one that the law was a reflection of.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul is explaining our relationship to the law in terms we can understand by using the example of slaves and masters. In our flesh we cannot fully grasp the spiritual things of God so this analogy was used. In reality we aren't slaves, but servants who choose to serve.

The audience to this letter was a Christian one and, therefore, Paul could use the past tense of the fact that they use to offer the parts of their body to sin of all kinds. Now, in Christ, by is encouraging them to offer their bodies as slaves to righteousness or Christ, who is our righteousness. In so doing, He gives us holiness and heals our minds of the wicked thoughts and impurities. One must submit to Christ so that He can do the healing. We aren't first healed and then go looking to be made right with God. While we were still sinners and unrighteous, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

Verse 20 goes on to say that in the past life of sin we were free from the *control* of righteousness. Instead, we controlled ourselves, being led by the flesh but what benefit did we get? Death. In essence we had no control. By submitting to Christ to be a slave to righteousness, we are controlled and mastered by Him and His Spirit.

Now that Christ lives in us, we are ashamed of what we used to think was okay. We are now free from the control of sin and the flesh, and are now slaves to God and happy to be so. The benefit of being controlled by the spirit leads to a better life of holiness that leads us into an eternity with our Master and Friend.

Verse 23 sums it all up: Sin brings death but God delivers us if we are willing to surrender to Him. He will give the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ who gives eternal life. Eternal life is in contrast to eternal death. There is only one or the other, no in-between.

I think we often have a misunderstanding of what death is. Jesus often simply said those who died were sleeping (Mark 5:39, John 11:11, Luke 8:52). This isn't to say that that is what happens when we die, but perhaps it may point to the fact that Jesus sees death differently. When I die, I am still going to be alive. Likewise, the ungodly will still be conscious of their existence but yet still are considered dead. Therefore, life isn't just a state of consciousness. So what is it? I propose it is a quality as well as the person of Christ. Both life and death are eternal, a state of awareness to one's situation, entered with physical bodies and are spent in certain locations. One difference seems to be the quality of the time spent. One either has pain and suffering or no tears or trials of any sort. Another difference is the person with whom the time is spent. Either you spend your time with Christ or without Him. You are in darkness or in the light. Since Jesus is the light of the world, it seems you are in the absence of Christ. Not only do we spend the time with Christ in eternal life, but He seems to be the very essence of our life. Consider the following verses:

- John 6:53 "Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.'"
- John 8:12 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"
- John 11:25 "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'"
- John 14:6-7 "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

- John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”
- Rom 8:2 “Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”
- 2 Cor 4:10 “So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”
- 1 John 5:20 “And we are in Him who is true-even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

If this is true, it seems that there are many today who are walking around alive under our current definition of life, but are actually the walking dead, because without Christ, there is no life. This is why the gift of God is eternal life IN Christ Jesus. Therefore, can we live in sin because we are under grace? I believe Moses could answer that question and end this chapter properly by saying, “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the LORD is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deut 30:19-20).

Romans 7

7:1 Do you not know, brothers-for I am speaking to men who know the law-that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? 2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. 3 So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

To clarify the purpose of the law Paul uses an example of marriage and since he is writing to the Jews who knew this law very well, they would be very familiar with what Paul is stating here. Just as the law has no affect on a person who is dead, a married woman is legally bound to her husband only as long as the husband is still alive. Once the husband dies the woman is free. Likewise, once one dies, the law is no longer in affect for the dead. The point Paul is making is this: He had just told us in chapter 6:8 that we died in Christ to sin. If we are dead to sin, the law is no longer in effect for us because death puts an end to any previous obligation.

The woman who was freed from the law of marriage is now free to take upon another marriage just as one who died to sin is free to take upon another covenant of righteousness. This is why Paul said in chapter six, “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness” (Rom 6:22). However, if the married woman tried to take upon another covenant while still married to her husband she would be an adulteress. The same is true for a man living under the law in sin trying to take upon a covenant of righteousness or a man of righteousness attempting to live under the law. In other words, anyone claiming Christ’s righteousness for themselves but still living under the law is an adulteress and is cheating

on God. What a great analogy to show the contrast and relationship of the old and new covenants.

There are other new testament verses that portray this truth of dying to be free:

- “But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation-” (Col 1:22-23).
- “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14).
- “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

One must be careful not to understand these verses as the death of the law. Paul is showing that the death of the husband frees the woman from the dominion of the law. Likewise, death to sin frees one from the dominion and control of the law. The law is still there, one is just not under its condemnation any longer. This is why these verses state that she is no longer under the law. The law is still in effect, she just isn't under it's dominion.

4 So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Another truth to these verses lies within the fact that a woman was bound to her husband. The New Testament consistently shows us that a wife is to be submissive to her husband (Eph 5:22, Col 3:18, 1 Tim 2:12). When her husband dies she is free from that commitment, however, if she marries another man she is to be submissive to her new husband. In other words, as Christians who have died to sin we are now to submit to Christ's righteousness. We died to the law and are now married and belong to Christ. This is why 6:22 refers to us as “slaves to God” and 6:18 as “slaves to righteousness.”

Often today we see submissiveness as weak and negative, however, any marriage operating under these godly principles will tell you it is healthy and good. How much more our marriage with Christ will flourish with the same principle applied. We read in Revelation that those in Christ are His bride: “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:9-10), “Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints) (Rev 19:7-8).

Verse four shows us that the purpose of dying to the law and belonging to Christ is to bear fruit. Just as one of the main purposes of a human marriage was to bear fruit (Mal 2:15) so, too, our union with Christ is to bear godly fruit. Apart from Christ,

however, we cannot bear good fruit. “Anything done apart from faith is sin”(Rom 14:23), or “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). When we belong and submit to Christ, the Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives. Indeed, this is our very purpose, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10).

Verse five explains the situation. When we were alive to sin and lived according to the sinful flesh, we obeyed what our bodies wanted and directed us to do. The law merely showed us we had sinned and the result of sin was death. There was no power within the law to bear good fruit, only to condemn us and show us that we had fallen short of God's expectations.

As believers in Christ who have died to this law and been united in Christ, our new husband, we have been released from the bondage of the law from our previous marriage. Now we serve Christ in our spirit as led by the Spirit, not by the flesh that was under control of the law. If it is the law motivating and empowering you to obey, you are still serving and married to your old husband. This is being unfaithful and living in adultery, therefore, we must put to death the sinful flesh and live according to the Spirit and His guidance and dominion. This is why Paul warned, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:1-3; see also Eph 5:29-31). God is Spirit and must be worshipped in the spirit (John 4:24). It is this understanding that caused Paul to write, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:3-6).

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." 8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. 10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. 11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

The natural response to what Paul is writing would be to say that the law was no longer useful or good. This would be a terrible mistake to preach or believe such a thing. The law has a purpose as Paul tells us in verse seven that the law defined what sin was. If the law had not said you weren't suppose to long after things you do not have, one might have thought it natural and okay to do so.

The problem was that the sinful flesh was so strong that we coveted all the time and the law, therefore, condemned us for breaking the tenth commandment, “Do not covet.” If it wasn’t for the law telling you not to do so, it would not be counted as breaking the law and sin would be dead.

Verse nine explains further that before the law was given we had life because there wasn’t a written command to break. However, once the command was given, our mind was stimulated to know right from wrong. For example, if there are cookies in the cookie jar, one might easily think they are there to be eaten and feel no guilt for having a few of them. However, once your mother told you not to eat any cookies, you would have a guilty conscience if you ate one. In other words, sin sprang to life as soon as your mother laid down the rules and you were as good as dead. Thus, the law has power to kill, but none to save.

The deeper meaning of verse nine is to show the purpose of the law. The Jews naturally saw the law as a means of sanctifying and making one holy. The exact opposite was true. Paul is using the pronoun “I” to show his personal connection with the law. He was once alive apart from the law but the commandments in his heart revealed his sin and brought him into guilty condemnation and even damnation. Paul realized that he was as good as dead, much like the prodigal’s father who said, “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24). Paul understood that he broke the commands and was lost, but through Christ was found and is now alive. The law isn’t what produced sanctification, the Gospel of Christ does that.

Another aspect of the “I” being used here in verse nine could suggest that Paul once viewed himself alive as a Pharisee. Though they had the law, they did not understand the purpose of it. That is to say that they knew the letter of the law and not the spirit of it. The Pharisees saw themselves as righteous because of the law. They figured they had kept it, ignoring the fact that it was impossible and that breaking one part of it, meant breaking all of it. These Pharisees saw themselves as alive but were actually spiritually dead because the law was not in their hearts, but merely in their heads. Paul, therefore, could be saying that when the commandments sprang to life in his heart, he then realized the death it brought to him and his need for Christ.

Verses 10-11 follow the same theme showing us that sin and the commandments don’t go well together. Just as your mother told you not to eat the cookie because she didn’t want you to have too much sugar and be unhealthy, the commandments were given for our own good. However, though obedience to the commandments was beneficial if obeyed, disobedience meant a spanking or even death. It is good to know the rules but once they are set, they have to be followed. There are many Scriptures telling us that these commandments were intended to bring life: Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them” (Lev 18:5), and “He follows My decrees and faithfully keeps My laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live” (Ezek 18:9).

Clearly the law was added to give life but the opposite seems to have happened. Was this a mistake? Not at all. Historically, we see the commandments weren’t given until the time of Moses in Exodus. Prior to this time, sin was not taken into account (Rom 5:13) because there was no commandment to break. (Keep in mind this is in a general sense. God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree and they broke that command. The result was death. We are talking about the Ten Commandments and the other precepts of God given to Moses). People were going against the character and nature of God so that

God needed to put something in stone to clarify who He was. In Galatians we read, “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” (Gal 3:19). Here we see that another reason the law was added was “because of sin.” Though people were sinning the sin wasn’t being taken into account until the law could be put into effect. Once it was, it showed people their ugliness until Jesus (the Seed) could come. Once Jesus was there, the law could show them their need for Jesus and thus be ready to receive Him joyfully. The law was added to make sin utterly sinful (v. 13) and Christ, utterly necessary. Therefore, it wasn’t a mistake for the law to bring death because in bringing death, it brought hope and a desire for deliverance in Christ, and thus, joy and life eternal. Christ, who fulfills the perfect law, now gives perfect life just as Leviticus 18:5 and others told us, the law gives life.

If man was perfect, these laws would bring only life and happiness as they will in heaven. The problem is that since we have a sin-filled flesh, it is impossible to resist the temptations and death is the inevitable result of our breaking the law. If we did not have the sin-filled flesh and we were focused purely on the Lord rather than ourselves, these commandments would bring abundant life, however, sin deceives us and has us looking towards our own flesh so that the commandments bring death. One can see why it is so important that our old man is crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6) so that the commandments can produce their benefit, even under the new covenant.

Verse 12 shows the commandments and the law to be separate, yet united. Some believe the commandments are merely the Ten Commandments and the Law includes both the commandments and the other precepts we read about in Leviticus and the other books of Moses. Others say the Law regulates the entire conduct of our life and the commandments regulate our heart. In any case, all of the commands of God, regardless of their grouping are referred to here in this chapter.

The final conclusion is that the law and commandments are holy because the purpose was to bring abundant and order-filled life. The corrupted flesh of man is the problem, not the law. These rules are righteous because they are truth and reflect the character of the One who is true. Therefore, they are good and one should never say the law is bad, outdated, or simply useful in the Old Testament. The fact that your mother wanted to protect you from the unhealthy cookies isn’t a bad thing, rather it is a reflection of her love for you. Likewise, God’s character and nature have not changed and these commandments still reflect that perfect, loving nature. Now that we no longer live by the sin-filled flesh, but by the righteousness of Christ, it allows us to receive the benefit of the commandments without the results of disobeying them.

Christ fulfilled the law for us, deserving no death, however, He did not stop there. In addition, Christ knew that we could not fulfill the commandments, so He also took our punishment for us by dying on the cross. Jesus couldn’t just forgive us, He had to take the penalty of our disobedience for us because He is holy, righteous and good. A righteous and holy God could not allow sinners into heaven any more than a righteous judge in our civil courts could allow a rapist to go free by just forgiving him. The rapist has to pay a penalty for justice to be done. Likewise, Jesus is just and the law had been broken so He had to pay the penalty for us. He went before the judge and said, I will take the death penalty in the place of this rapist. Our holy, righteous and good Savior followed and fulfilled the requirements and consequences of the law.

We would do well to remember the words of the Psalmist: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps 19:7-11). The law clearly has a dual purpose, to bring death first so that life may follow. As it has been said, it is the same sun that melts wax and hardens clay. The law will harden or melt depending on the heart that receives it.

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

In continuing the quest to find out whether the law is good or bad since it produced death Paul asks whether what was intended to be good, changed and became evil. Again, the answer is a clear NO! The law was and is good, even when it produced death, it was never death in itself. It wasn't the law's fault, but rather the sin-filled flesh of man that was to blame. The death the law produced brought life. Without the law condemning us, there was no sin to be freed from. Without experiencing that freedom, forgiveness wouldn't be any big deal and our love for Christ would be minimal. He who sins much will love much and he who sins little will love little.

In order for sin to be seen as a bad thing, the law was needed to reveal it and show the consequences of it – death. Take the current situation in our society as a living example. Today, even among the churches, the law is not being used for the lost to reveal sin or condemn. A homosexual can go to a church and never hear that the sin of practicing homosexuality is against the law of God. The result is that homosexuality isn't seen as sin, the homosexual is never convicted, therefore, he never reaches true repentance and never takes the Bible seriously. This is the result of preaching a Gospel without the law. If only the law were used it would make the sin of sodomy, heterosexual promiscuity, divorce, drunkenness, uncontrolled anger and many more, utterly sinful. The result would be a country that would repent and be healed as God promised: “If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14-15). Instead, however, I fear God's other promises are taking affect: “‘But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it,’ declares the LORD” (Jer 12:17). Deuteronomy makes it even more detailed and to the point:

Your children who follow you in later generations and foreigners who come from distant lands will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it. The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew

in fierce anger. All the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. Therefore the LORD's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now." The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. - Deut 29:22-29

Is sin utterly sinful in the church you are attending? Is sin utterly sinful in your household? Do you see the enormity of sin in God's eyes and believe the sure death it produces? If not, perhaps the law still needs to do its work.

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

These verses will show the paradox of the flesh and spirit. Just as God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, man is body soul and spirit. Just as the Holy Trinity is one God, yet three persons and impossible for our human minds to grasp, the human trinity is also one body, yet three parts and impossible to make full understanding of. However, Paul will clearly make strong distinctions between the human body and the spirit. The depth of the rest of this chapter is inspiring and must be read carefully. If you do not have time to read the rest of chapter seven in one sitting, I suggest reading it another time.

Again Paul tells us that the law is good and spiritual. That is that the law works in ways that science cannot touch or prove by affecting the inner spiritual man, not our outward flesh. However, Paul, as you and I, are all unspiritual. That is bad to the bone because of our sin-filled flesh. We were all sold as slaves to sin in the Garden of Eden. The word "sold" implies that we have no choice in the matter but are slaves to the master. We cannot help ourselves as the desires of the flesh cause us to sin daily in mind or deed. In other words, Adam and Eve were created with the ability not to sin. After the fall, we had no ability not to sin (slaves to it) but, in heaven there will be no ability to sin.

Verse 15 shows Paul's struggle that all can relate to. Paul, himself could not grasp the depth of his unspiritual nature. Though he wanted to be perfect and obey the law, he couldn't. Instead, that which he knew was wrong because of the law, he still did. Some use this as an example to say that Christians can sin and it is okay because even Paul sinned. There is a huge difference, however, because though Paul did what he shouldn't,

he hated it. Many today sin and don't hate the sin because God forgives. This is a sure sign of a heart that has not been changed by the Spirit of God. I love children, therefore, I hate abortion. I love God, therefore, I hate sin. Sin is the very opposite of who God is and to not see sin as sinful is to hate God. Jude warns us of men like this: "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 4).

Any true believer will sin, many of them hundreds of times in a day. In some cases they may be bound in a sin like alcoholism or pornography. Even though they sin, they still hate that sin and desire for it to be gone. Paul hated his sin, whereas, the false prophets of today don't see or preach sin as being utterly sinful, they just preach about God's forgiveness. This isn't what Paul does here is it? "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9).

One other aspect should be addressed. Some suggest that verse 15 does away with our free will and we are like puppets doing things we don't want to do and vice versa. The exact opposite is true. If we were puppets, God wouldn't control you to do evil. It is the Satan and the flesh that empowers the flesh, but it is the Spirit of God that empowers our spirit to choose. It has been said that the eye can see objects but it is the light that empowers the eye to see them. Without the light, the power to see objects is useless. Likewise, the spirit of man can choose to follow God and obey His commands, however, without the empowering Spirit to shed light upon our situation, our ability to choose is useless.

In verse 16 Paul explains further. If he does sin when he doesn't want to he recognizes it as sin because the good law convicts him of that sin. In other words, Paul hates sin and repents because the law shows him the sin to be utterly sinful. The law doesn't allow us to look at sin as "no big deal," but rather something so heinous that it is deserving of death. If sin is in opposition to God, the law is very good to steer us away from that.

Verses 17-19 are very important. Earlier in this commentary in the section on 5:9-11 we discussed what it is to be a saint. That is essential in understanding these verses as well. However, to add to the earlier point, we must remember that Paul himself is not taking the blame for doing what he doesn't want to do. Instead, he blames the invisible power of sin. Just as we cannot see gravity but we witness its affects, the noun of sin, cannot be seen, yet its affects are clearly visible. Paul, a new creation in Christ and a spiritual being, has been forgiven of all sin. This means that Christ looks upon Paul as a saint who sins or a sheep that sometimes acts like a goat, nonetheless, a sheep. In verse 18 Paul makes it clear that nothing good lives in him, that is, in his FLESH. He isn't talking about his new nature wherein the Scriptures say, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9-10).

We often misunderstand the many verses that tell us that we no longer sin (1 John 2:1, 1 Cor 15:34) or that we are now saints because we view them in the natural and physical world. John warned us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

Paul is referring to the spiritual sense as he describes the power of sin. Flesh gives birth to flesh but spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:6). In the spiritual world, I am not what I see in a mirror, but what Christ sees in the spirit. If a train runs me over, I'm not laying on the tracks, my body may be, but I am with the Lord. This body is merely a tent that I live in (2 Cor 5:1, 2 Peter 1:13). Sin resides in the flesh, not the spirit (we will discuss more on this in the section on 7:23). This is one reason why our current bodies do not go to heaven. When the Lord comes back our same renewed spirit goes to heaven, but we receive new bodies at that time. Christ renewed our spirit (who we truly are) but our bodies or tents still remain tainted with sin and must die. Though Paul wants to do good because it is what his spirit desires, the flesh is strong and overcomes his spirit at times. Jesus refers to this when He told the disciples, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matt 26:41). In Galatians we read, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law" Again, these verses clearly show us that there are two powers at work within all of us, the spirit and the flesh. The spirit lives by grace and the flesh by the law. For this reason, we must watch, pray and seek God and His Spirit daily to lead our bodies in godly ways. If we are not in tune with the Spirit of God through prayer and the study of God's Word, we will fall into the temptations of the flesh very easily. This is just one reason why Christians should be reading and meditating upon the Bible each and every day. If the flesh can be put into submission we could be done with sin in a spiritual sense as Peter testifies: "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin" (1 Peter 4:1). If we don't allow our flesh to drive us, but rather make it suffer and not give in to its desires, we can live by the Spirit. Therefore, we cannot say we have no sin because we live in a sin-filled tent in the physical, but by living in the spirit, Christ has purified us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

Verse 20 repeats the fact that it isn't the spiritual Paul who sins, but the natural power of sin that resides in Paul's tent that does it. The great news is that Paul is no longer a slave to his body of sin, but is now a slave to righteousness. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36). Jesus has set Paul free so that he no longer sins in his spirit because all sins have been paid for and forgiven. Sin no longer has dominion over him because the Spirit of Christ can overcome each individual temptation if Paul will allow that Spirit to reign. In chapter six we saw, "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). The law can show you your sin, but it cannot subdue it. God's grace is what has put the power of sin in subjection to those who live in the spirit, not under the law. Paul will clarify this in a few verses where he says, "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature (Greek *sarx* which is "flesh") a slave to the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). In Paul's mind (spirit) he is a slave to God's law which ultimately points us to His righteousness, however, in the flesh he is still a slave to sin but, the flesh is not Paul's identity anymore. His flesh will rot and stay behind on this earth, while his mind and spirit are now with the Lord. Paradise is where Paul is! In the flesh, Paul strived for perfection, yet never quite attaining it, but in

the Spirit he was perfect and blameless because of Christ Jesus. “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil 3:12-13).

21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Paul takes the previous verses and sums up the matter in the close of this chapter. When Paul wants to do good as instructed by his spirit, sin in his flesh is right there instructing him to do evil. However, in the very depth of his inner being he still delights in God's law even among the evil desires waging within him. It is within the inner man that the Spirit dwells, “I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:16-17). Note also that Paul doesn't despise or feel guilty because of the law, but delights and cherishes the very reflection of who God is. Because he loves and has faith in God Paul loves the law.

Verse 23 exposes the reason for all of this confusion. The law of God is what Paul delights in, but there is another law at work. A law is a rule that stands regardless of our desiring it to be present. This law is working in the members of Paul's body, in other words, his flesh. Note that this bad law in his body is waging war against the good law in Paul's mind. Therefore, there is a battle between the mind and the body. Why? The answer is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). Our spirit is where our mind and ability to reason resides. It is one of the things that separates us from the animals. The power of sin in our body is warring against Christ in our mind.

The mind is where the battleground is at. A man walks down the grocery aisle and sees a pretty woman that his heart immediately lusts after. He can choose to go down that aisle or come back to it later. The thought was presented to the mind by the body when he first saw the woman. Now that the mind is presented with the thought, he can choose in his spirit to reject that thought to God's honor and glory. As we read in Corinthians, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). James tells us that the thought presenting itself wasn't the sin, but acting upon it would be: “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, [the flesh] he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15). Lest anyone try and justify themselves by saying, “the devil made me do it” we must remember that the devil only does the tempting, you do the choosing.

We are all prisoners to the law of sin as long as we are in our current bodies wherein sin resides. We have a bad roommate and there is nothing we can do about it except choose to live in the Spirit and not hang out with him. As Paul will later instruct

us, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1-2). Our bodies must be willingly offered to the Lord and put into His submission that we might live and worship in the spirit.

In verse 24 Paul reflects on this wretchedness within his members and asks the question of who can rescue him from his physical body wherein sin dwells. He doesn't want to continue doing evil despite his desire to do good. I believe all Christians struggle with this same battle. So what is the answer? Give thanks to God through Jesus Christ who has made it possible to live in the Spirit and for the Spirit to live in us (1 John 4:12,16; 3:24, 2 Tim 1:14, Gal 2:20, 1 Cor 3:16, Eph 2:6). Continue to, “Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:1-3). We need to persevere until the Lord comes back or He takes us to be with Him just as Paul said, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace” (Acts 20:24).

Paul closes by saying that he not only delights in God's law (v. 22) but is also willing to serve the law of God in his mind. Once more, we see the mind is the spiritual piece of man that allows him to reason and relate with this living God. It is here in which the old self spoken of in Romans 6:6 was crucified. It is also here in which the new man has been created to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:23-24). Clearly, the unregenerate man cannot understand the spiritual things of God because he has not been created new and the Spirit of God doesn't reside in him.

At first it may be confusing to see that Paul is a slave to the law, especially when we read, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). However if we continue on in Corinthians it states, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 57). Paul isn't a slave to the law in that he must keep the commandments because Christ already fulfilled them for Paul. Now that the requirements of the law have been met, Paul willingly wants to obey them out of love and reverence, not out of obligation. Contrary to popular opinion, Christians don't ignore God's laws, we delight in them. Paul called himself a bond-servant of Christ in the opening of the book of Romans. Just as a servant could willingly stay with his master and have his ear pierced, Paul has chosen to serve Christ. On the other hand, unwillingly he is a slave to sin in his body. This is the paradox we all live with as Christians. We consciously serve God in mind and spirit and are happy to be slaves to the righteousness pointed to by the law, yet the flesh will always be there to tempt us into sin. But again, “blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom 4:8). We look forward to the day that Christ returns and gives us new bodies and, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16-17).

Romans 8

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

The “Therefore” of verse one refers back to the fact that we can give thanks to God, that through Christ He has delivered us from the wretched sin-filled flesh, indeed, even sin itself has no power over us. Because of the forgiveness of sins received by followers of Jesus, the law and the devil cannot condemn any longer. The devil is the “accuser” but he can accuse no longer. Just as Satan tried to accuse Job of unrighteousness before the throne of God, he tries to bring accusations against you before our heavenly Father as well. I can just see him going up to Jesus and saying, “Brian calls himself a follower of Christ?” “Did you see how Brian was behaving when I brought those trials to him?” God responds with, “Yes, that is my saint Brian and sometimes he acts that way because he can’t help himself, yet he is holy and blameless because he is covered in My Son’s blood.” “Besides, Brian hasn’t broken any laws, because My Son has taken care of that for him so there isn’t any condemnation if the laws requirements have already been met for him.”

Keep in mind that Paul is referring to only those who are “in” Christ Jesus. It is taught clearly throughout the Scriptures that God does a miracle for those who are followers of Christ. He makes them new and unites them with Himself (Rom 8:1 Phil 1:1; 3:9; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 16:7-11). Anyone, not in Christ, still stands condemned: “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18).

As verse two explains further, it is because Jesus has fulfilled the law in my stead that the Spirit of life in my inner being has set me free from the sin-filled flesh of my outer shell. Though my shell has sin within, it is no longer I who do it but sin living in me that does it. Once again, thanks be to God for making me a new creation in Christ Jesus: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17-18).

Verse three continues to show that the law was powerless to bring salvation and freedom because the sin-filled flesh could not obey it. The law, therefore, could not bring about the good it was intended for. A school-yard game runs smoothly and brings great joy and excitement when the rules are followed, but anger and sorrow when the rules are broken. Likewise, the law was intended to be good, but it was weakened and brought death when the rules weren’t followed. If fully obeyed the law would indeed bring holiness, righteousness, peace, joy, and utter bliss. This is the way it will be in heaven when all the rules will be followed. However, the disobedience of the law weakened it and brought condemnation, hell and damnation as the game of life was ruined.

God saved the day by sending His Son to referee, even more than that, take the consequences of God's wrath upon Himself. Remember in the school-yard when someone broke the rules of the game. The wrath of everyone would come down on the rule breaker telling him to knock it off and stop cheating etc. All the anger and wrath that comes from breaking the rules were put upon Jesus, yet this was much more severe than any school-yard game because the wrath was much more than a chewing out, it was not only death, but separation from God. Christ became uncorrupted flesh in the likeness of sin-filled man. He became our scapegoat and sin-offering. We often look at the Gospel as Jesus just dying on the cross for us. Many people have died on crosses. What makes Jesus' death so special? In His death, He took upon Himself the sins of the entire world even though He Himself had no sin: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). All the guilt, all the anger, all the darkness, all the wrath of God was placed upon Him. Words cannot describe because the human mind cannot understand fully what Christ went through on that cross. It was utter separation from God because He was sin-filled with our sins and this filth could not be in the presence of a holy God. This is why He cried out on the cross, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Hebrews explains the intent of this entire section:

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am-it is written about Me in the scroll- I have come to do Your will, O God.'" First He said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not desire, nor were You pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then He said, "Here I am, I have come to do Your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" -- Heb 10:1-10

When it was over and the consequences of breaking the law had been satisfied, God raised His own Son from the dead (Rom 10:9). His death paid the penalty but still left us broke and poor. It was His resurrection that brought justification, freedom and life: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). What Christ did was condemn sin within sin-filled man, not the man himself. Again, this is why our current bodies will not enter heaven but we will receive new bodies that are not contaminated with condemned sin. The man himself, who is renewed in Christ, will reign with Christ.

In the latter part of verse four note that the “righteous requirements” of the law are met. We see once more that the requirements of the law and even the law itself is good. It is the act of disobeying the law that is bad. If only the law could be obeyed, great things would result. Some have said that the law failed. These words imply that the law was bad but nothing could be further from the truth. The law never failed man, man failed the law. The law was a shadow of the good things to come in Christ, both in His sacrifice to fulfill that law and in our heavenly home to live under that law.

Verse 4 shows us that the law could be obeyed so that its original intent could come about. Clearly Christ never tried to get rid of the law, He merely fulfilled it, elevating it to its righteous result. Until sin (breaking of the law) was condemned, man could not be righteous, nor stand in the presence of God. In fact, God couldn’t dwell within tainted man either. However, with sin condemned, the righteous *requirements* of the law could be fully obeyed because Christ could now indwell in man, that is, in those who choose to live by the Spirit. The sad truth of the matter is that many will not choose to do so. Instead, they choose to live and remain in the flesh, feeding its sinful desires and being a slave to its demands, ultimately leading to death. Those living in the flesh will have evidence of being under control of that flesh, “The acts of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21). On the other hand, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-25). Those who live in the Spirit can rejoice that the law was not fulfilled by them but, rather in them through Christ.

I saw a great illustration of this once in a cartoon-like picture. There was a man drawn standing up in the middle of the page with twenty or thirty other men looking exactly like him all around. These extra men symbolized the man’s flesh and their desires. Each one had a rope tied around the main man trying to lead him into different sins and emotions. Obviously, he was beaten down, exhausted and in despair because he was a slave to himself. What Christ has given us is another picture in my head. I see the same man standing tall and free with the other twenty or thirty men having ropes constraining them with their arms tight against their sides. Each rope is attached to Jesus who stands before the man. The man with his joy-filled eyes fixed in adoration upon Jesus, stands ready to follow his Savior wherever He may take him. Sin stands condemned, but man is righteous and free when they live according to the Spirit. Which picture are you?

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Verse five tells us that when we live unchanged by God's Spirit we have no choice but to live in our old-self and follow what our flesh desires. Only when we believe upon Jesus as a response to His calling and drawing is our old-self crucified with Christ. Once that happens, we can live according to the Spirit within us and deny the flesh as we set our minds upon what the Spirit desires.

Verse six shows that the mind of those living in the sin-filled flesh is death and destruction. Timothy writes, "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives" (1 Tim 5:5-6). In other words, having our thoughts constantly thinking about how to please ourselves results in eternal death and damnation as well as earthly emptiness and frustration. However, those who have the mind of Christ have eternal life, peace and joy in the Lord. Notice the mind is controlled by the Spirit, but only if man will allow the Spirit to have that control. God is a gentleman and He will not force Himself upon people.

Anyone who has not been regenerated by the Spirit will have a sin-filled mind that is in total opposition to God and is an enemy of Him. The mind doesn't submit (allow the Spirit to work) to God's law because it is incapable of doing so unless it first be changed by faith. God's law is a reflection of who God is and, therefore, not submitting to God's law is not submitting to God. Only when one has faith and is given the mind of Christ can they obey God's law and be united rather than opposed to God. If the mind (very inner being of man) is carnal it is as opposite to God as is Satan himself. Faith changes the inner man (mind) and even though we have the carnal *flesh*, are brought near to God in our spirit. Without faith it is impossible to please God because without faith you are controlled by the old sin-filled flesh. There must be a renewal in the spirit before Christ can live inside of you. Christ cannot live in or be around unholiness. Submit to Christ and then your spirit will submit to God's law through Christ. Put in Scriptural terms, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:15-16). On the other hand, there are many out there who believe they are in Christ because they go to church or pray, yet their minds are set on earthly things and they ignore God's commands. The Bible warns these people, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable" (Prov 28:9).

What mind do you have? The man is as the mind is. Are your thoughts consistently directed towards God or the flesh? Where do you find your pleasure? In things of God or things of this earth? Consider the following verses:

- "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely? But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:4-10).

- “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17).
- “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matt 6:20-24).

If this convicts you, perhaps you need to ask if you have allowed Christ to submit your body to God’s law.

One more important aspect to these verses is that we must remember that even those who have the mind of Christ sometimes live in the flesh. Even at those times, the flesh is in opposition to God, though he himself is a saved man. It is not the mind itself that is in opposition to God in verse seven, rather the desires themselves. Both a saved man and an unsaved man have thoughts within the mind that are in opposition to God, even though the saved man himself is not. The Barnes commentary on these verses explains, “It does not directly prove the doctrine of universal depravity; but it proves only that where such attention exists to the corrupt desires of the soul, there is hostility to God. It is indeed implied that that supreme regard to the flesh exists everywhere by nature, but this is not expressly affirmed. For the object of the apostle here is not to teach the doctrine of depravity, but to show that where such depravity in fact exists, it involves the sinner in a fearful controversy with God.” This indeed is one of the purposes of the law. For the unsaved it brings them to conviction and shows them their need of Jesus. For the Godly, it is a mirror that reflects the desires of the flesh that are in opposition to God and is used as a curb to keep us on the road of Christ’s love and guidance.

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

The saved man of faith is not controlled by the flesh any longer. Note, he still has the sin-filled flesh but he is no longer controlled by it, rather he is controlled by the Spirit of God now living in him. One cannot be a Christian without this Spirit for it is the very thing that makes a man a Christian (Eph 3:17). This does not mean that a believer is like a robot or puppet having every movement and thought controlled by the puppet master. Instead, it means that we have a resource within us that can be used or ignored.

Verse ten explains that if Christ is truly inside of you, your body is dead spiritually. Again, this is why you receive new bodies in heaven because the sin that resides in it cannot enter holiness. Paul writes, “Christ, who, by the power that enables

Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body” (Phil 3:20-21). Also, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44). This transformation will not take place until He comes again. However, even though your body is dead, your spirit, that is your true identity, is alive because it is made holy and righteous through Christ. It has been made new so as to allow Christ to be united to your spirit.

The good news is that with our spiritual union with Christ there still is an advantage for our dead bodies here on earth. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Spirit, so you, too, have that same powerful Spirit within you who will give life, joy and peace to your mortal body. As we read in Galatians, the Spirit produces fruit within us that is exhibited through our mortal bodies right now: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Gal 5:22-26). Indeed, even our mortal bodies go through a change when the Spirit of God lives within us. Our bodies house our spirits and even Christ Himself. The tabernacle and temple were mere buildings, yet the Spirit of God living within them made them holy buildings. Likewise the Bible tells us, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20). God has made us holy even within our mortal bodies.

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Because Christ has made us new and deposited His Holy Spirit within us, we are obligated to use that Spirit. Verse 13 indicates that one still has a choice to live according to the desire of the flesh, but if that is what you choose you will die. On the other hand, if you choose to allow the Spirit to put the flesh into submission, you will find life and sonship with Jesus, both here and in heaven. This is why verse fourteen goes as far as to call us sons of God. For some this may be bothersome, yet there are many places where believers are referred to as such (John 1:12; Eph 1:5, Gal 4:5, Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1-2; Matt 5:9,45; Luke 6:35).

Verse 15 reveals what the Spirit does in our lives. We no longer live in fear or slavery to sin. Timothy speaks of the same truth, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7). In contrast to

the old-self that doomed us under a fearful law that was impossible to keep, the Spirit sets us free and allows us to call God our Father, not our inevitable destroyer. The depth of this verse is beyond what words can describe. The Jews were ready to kill Jesus because He was calling God His Father. Why should this upset them? We read in John, “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Sonship makes us equal with God. That almost sounds blasphemous doesn’t it. Even today, most unbelieving Jews would call you a blasphemer just for believing these verses. Do you believe what the Scriptures say about your equality with God or does it seem so blasphemous to you that you don’t want to grasp this truth? It is the Spirit of God is testifying that we are indeed, God’s children and thus, equal with God.

Another important note on verse fifteen is that we call God, Abba and Father. This may signify that both Jews and Gentiles are welcomed into this adoption as sons. The Greeks called God *pater*, or father, while the Jews called Him Abba. Both signifying a personal and loving relationship.

Verse seventeen explains further what it means to be equal with God. Just as Jesus was a Son of God, we, too, are now sons of God. Just as in the Old Testament a father would leave an inheritance for his sons, God has given us an inheritance. Typically, the first-born would receive a double portion of the inheritance and also receive a special blessing. However, Christ has made us a co-heir receiving full blessing and honor as the firstborn. Galatians elaborates on this Romans passage:

“What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the *full rights of sons*. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Gal 4:1-7).

What does it mean to be a co-heir? Christ was to be the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2) and therefore we will receive all things as well (Rev 21:7). What is included in this? First of all, God left His Spirit to dwell in us, just as He dwelt in Christ. It is this Spirit that is a testimony to one being a son. If you don’t have the Spirit you aren’t a son of God. This Spirit claims ownership showing that we belong to God, “He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor 1:21-22). This Spirit also empowers us, as it did Christ, do bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Secondly, a resurrection from spiritual death and a heavenly throne with Jesus is part of our inheritance: “And God *raised us* up with Christ and seated *us with Him* in the *heavenly realms* in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Again, we may not feel like we have been raised up and seated in the heavenly realms, but it is what the Bible says.

A third part of sonship is being united as brothers with Christ as we see later in this chapter, "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29-30). As family is one blood, so we are in Christ. Even Jesus, when He was praying for the disciples and those that would come after them, asked the Father to give them the same glory that He had given Him: "I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me" (John 17:22-23). This sonship allows us to be united to God in the same way that Christ was united with His father. This seems unbelievable yet the Bible is clear about it giving many verses showing our unity with Jesus and that He is in us and we are in Him (1 John 4:13, 2 Thess 1:12, Col 2:6, 2 John 2 etc.). This truth is so incredible and powerful yet it seems so few grasp its significance.

Fourth, sonship means we are heirs of God Himself. As Jesus was our High Priest we are now priest of God as well (Rev 1:6). The priests receive God as a part of their inheritance just as He told them, "I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites" (Num 18:20). No doubt, sonship is important and often overlooked or ignored by most believers today.

Fifth, sonship means reigning with Christ as we read in Timothy, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12). Also in Revelation, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev 3:21). This is what Jesus was speaking of when He told His disciples, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matt 19:28-29).

There is another part of this sonship that is important as well. Some of those who like to think about their unity and all the blessings that come with being a son of God, forget about the suffering that comes from this relationship as well. As this section closes it tells that we are co-heirs with Christ IF we share in His sufferings so that we might share in His glory. Sonship is not a light thing and isn't something to just accept without first considering the cost. Jesus warned us of this in Luke 14:28-33:

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple."

Although there is no cost to receive Jesus, there is a high cost of following Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross

daily and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it” (Luke 9:23-25). We must share in Christ’s sufferings as Jesus also warned, “All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13). There is a high cost of mercy. Jesus was merciful to us but it cost Him His life and yet the Bible tells us, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Simply because we are co-heirs with Christ the world will hate us. As they persecuted, mocked, despised and talked abusively about Christ, they will do the same to you as you show mercy. Isn’t it ironic, yet Biblical, that even though Christians are the ones who give the most money and help in disasters they are the ones who are hated and despised because of their relationship with Jesus? The world will hate you when you are merciful just as it hated Christ when He was merciful. We must share in His suffering that we, too, will share in His glory. However, do not be dismayed because of these sufferings because “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen” (2 Cor 4:17-18). Therefore do not fear and let us look expectantly for that day as John writes, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Following the theme of suffering that comes from showing mercy and sharing in Christ’s mission, Paul tells us that they are nothing when compared to the greatness of the glory to come and he certainly could speak from experience when it came to this matter of suffering as he was persecuted greatly for his faith (2 Cor 11:25). Not only did Paul understand the tests of suffering but he could also relate to God’s glory as he speaks of his personal experience, “And I know that this man-whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows- was caught up to paradise” (2 Cor 12:3-4). If we simply fix our eyes on Christ the trials and tribulations of life won’t seem so bad after all. Paul wrote in Corinthians, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen” (2 Cor 4:17-18). We also read of this in Hebrews:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those

He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, *that we may share in His holiness*. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. --- Heb 12:2-11

In verses 19-21 we see that even the creation itself is waiting for the final days of glory because all of creation was put under the curse of man, not because of its own sin, but because of Adams. Adam had dominion over the earth and since it was subject to him, his fall affected everything under him. However, when the Lord returns the creation will return to that perfect state as it was in the garden of Eden before the fall. Peter writes, "But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Also in Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev 21:1, see also Isa 65:17, 66:22). Just as the children of God have been redeemed and wait expectantly for their new bodies, the creation waits for its deliverance from the bondage of decay that it is in.

Another alternate understanding of verses 19-21 hinges upon the word "creation." Some translations use "creature" instead. The Greek phrase here is *pasa hee ktisis* and is found in Mark 16:15 as, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to *all creation*," and in Col 1:23 when it says, "this is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to *every creature* under heaven." Thus, some have said that this is not referring to the creation but the Gentiles or angels. Further support comes from the phrase in verse 20 saying, "was subjected to frustration." The word "frustration" is futility or *mataioteeti* in the Greek. It is also said of the Gentiles that they walk *en mataioteeti*, in the futility of their mind in Ephesians, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the *futility of their thinking*" (Eph 4:17). However, I find the interpretation of the creation itself to be fitting with the rest of Scripture. We clearly see that the ground was cursed, not by its own choice but by the result of sin. Also, the fact that all of creation praises God and will be renewed supports the idea that it, too, is waiting patiently along with the redeemed of man. Shortly after creation we see the stars praising God, "On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone- while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:6-7)? Scientifically, it has been discovered that the stars emit a vibration of sound waves that indeed makes music. Besides all of this, if the Gentiles were being referred to it would make more sense to just say so. Since it is Christ who created all things and holds all things together, all of creation, including every creature, is waiting for His return. This does not put the rocks as having spirits or souls but simply means that everything is under God's dominion. If the ground could be cursed, it certainly can and will be restored. Although some say the Gentiles were subjected to vanity without a choice in the matter, we see that everyone had a choice even before Abraham was called and the distinction of a Jew or Gentile came about. Theologians have argued over what

“creatures” means for centuries and I’m sure the debate won’t stop here. One can make a case for either and although I am partial to the creation, I won’t close my mind to the possibility of it being something else.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Even those who interpret verses 20-21 as Gentiles seem to admit this is talking about the inanimate creation, yet the same Greek word is used here. Paul is speaking as if it was common sense that the whole creation is groaning like a woman in childbirth. Birth pains are slow in coming but increase as time goes on. Even as a mother waits for the baby to grow there are often uncomfortable and painful situations throughout the pregnancy. Likewise, the earth is said to have an increase in earthquakes, tornados, and all kinds of other natural disasters.

The “not only so, but we ourselves” of verse 23 makes a distinction between the inanimate creation and those who have a relationship with Christ. Since Paul is distinguishing (words, “not only so”) between the creation itself and men who receive new bodies indicates that what Paul referred to just two verses earlier was the inanimate creation that was to be restored as well, not the Gentiles.

The early church had the firstfruits of the Spirit and the pains of persecution did indeed increase dramatically at that time. However, I believe those who have the firstfruits are all Christians until the time of Revelation being fulfilled. We read in James of all believers: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18). Also in Revelation while referring to the 144,000: “These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4). Who would then be the “second” fruit? Though I can’t be sure, one possibility could be found in later parts of Revelation where we read of the tribulation saints: “They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection” (Rev 20:4-6). Could it be that those who partake of the “first resurrection” are the ones with the “first fruits” of the Spirit?

In any case those with the first fruits certainly include the believers in Christ of the early church and I believe up to the present time. The early Christians were eagerly waiting for paradise and to receive their new bodies when their final adoption as sons would take place upon the Lord’s return. I would say most believers today would also say the same thing. This is not to say they, or we, weren’t already sons of God, but that our full inheritance has not yet been received. Though we are redeemed already, our full reward is yet to be seen. The inward groan comes not only from the physical body, but even more so, from the spiritual self which is bound to this body of death. It is the spirit

that desires to be free from this flesh so that Paul and all Christians can stop “doing what they do not want to do.”

The first fruits of the Spirit can also signify the beginnings of something greater yet to come. God’s grace is only a foreshadowing of the glory to come. This is indicated as well in the words of John: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). Paul also tells us that it is by the same power of the Spirit that will bring in this glory for us, “By the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body” (Phil 3:21).

The “adoption as sons” is already done in part but we wait for the full blessings and rights of that sonship to come about. In one of the most amazing Scriptures testifying about our sonship we see Jesus say, “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.* So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to My brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises’” (Heb 2:10-12). Jesus calls us His brothers and will even declare our name in the presence of the saints. This may be what is talked about in Revelation: “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it” (Rev 2:17). Talk about glory!

Verse 24 refers back to the hope of our new bodies. How were we saved in this hope? It is used here in the sense that our looking forward to our deliverance is what led us to Christ. The law revealed our sin and the need of a Savior. This caused us to hope for a way out and Jesus presented Himself as that hope. However, those who have put on Christ Jesus do not yet have their full hope fulfilled because they are not entirely with the Lord yet. Paul says that hope that is seen or fulfilled isn’t really hope because you already have it. On one hand we already have salvation, but on the other we are still in this sin-filled flesh. It is like winning the lottery but having to wait for the check to come in the mail. If you don’t fully have the object of your affection, you wait for it patiently in hope and excitement. The same truth is applied when we see that “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). The greatest is love because it is the only one that is eternal. Our faith and hope will one day be completed when the Lord returns, but love will remain. In the meantime “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us” (Rom 5:2-5).

In context here, it may be said that we should be careful not to be so heavenly focused that we are no earthly good. God has put us here in these bodies for a reason so we should be patient and work diligently as we wait for our hope to be fulfilled when we receive new bodies. Jesus gave us this truth when He said, “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of

the night” (Luke 12:38). Therefore, if we fix our eyes on the hope which we have, the trials of this life can be bearable as we live in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

In the same way as the Spirit groans inwardly within us as we patiently wait in hope for the Lord's return and the redemption of our bodies, the Spirit also helps us in the times when our hope seems far off. In the weakness of our bodies there are many cares and concerns that come about and at times we don't even know what we should be praying for. At these times, the Spirit within us will step in and intercede by going to the Father with spiritual groans that words of any language cannot express.

God searches our hearts and knows the Spirit so He knows just what is needed. Jeremiah recorded, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind” (Jer 17:10). Unlike man, who often prays with unpure motives and seeking to fulfill our own desires, the Spirit prays only in accordance with the will of God. Often times the disciples had good intentions in their prayers but were ignorant as to what they were really asking because they couldn't see the whole picture (Luke 9:54-44, Matt 20:22). Solomon wrote, “For who knows what is good for a man in life” (Eccl 6:12). Therefore, the Spirit and God being one, the will of God is being prayed for you in your life. God searches our hearts and knows what is best for us even before we know the need itself (Mat 6:8). The Father has left His Spirit within us to guide us into all truth. Jesus told us this would happen: “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you” (John 16:13-15). Believers can have great peace knowing that the Spirit is interceding for them according to truth and God's perfect will. There is no better place on earth to be than in the center of the Father's will.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Here is another word of encouragement for those who are going through trials. Not only does the Spirit intercede in prayer for them (v. 27) but also through any of these trials, God works good in them. This promise is not for the ungodly, but only for those who love the Lord and are called for His purpose. Many people believe that they are here on earth for their own benefit and enjoyment. The Scriptures clearly tell us that we are here for God's purposes. However, when we walk in His will and serve Him only, we receive benefit and enjoyment that is eternal. Many times the trials we grow through may be the Lord's training and discipline as the Psalmists wrote, “Before I was afflicted I

went astray, but now I obey Your word. You are good, and what You do is good; teach me your decrees” (Ps 119:67-68). Likewise we read in Hebrews, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:11).

Ultimately, that you are drawn closer to Him and that men be saved (giving peace and joy) is God’s will. There are only a handful of passages that talk about the will of God, but all of them refer to obedience and anything that leads to salvation. Peter said, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Peter 4:19). Sometimes it is God’s will that we suffer, in order that we be sanctified. We also see that “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:3-6). Finally, we are to “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:16-18). This is the purpose to which we have been called, to give all praise, glory and honor to our Creator.

Verse 29 explains that our purpose is for God’s glory. God knew us before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4) and in the mind of God, we were predestined, that is ordained from the beginning, to serve the Lord. This is not to say we are puppets and that we had no choice in the matter of believing or rejecting the Gospel. That would get rid of free will and bring no glory to God. Rather because God is omniscient He knew beforehand who would accept Him and who would not. It was destined to happen because He knows all things, not because He controls all things. For example, God does not cause suffering, He only allows it to happen. God did not bring upon the troubles for Job, He only allowed Satan to oppress him for God to get the glory. Likewise, God does not make people to go to hell, He only allows them to by their own decisions to reject His mercy that is offered to everyone. Since God knows a man that will be born 100 years from now and who will reject His grace, it is already predestined in God’s sight what will happen. How does God get glory from this? First of all, God is just and justice will be served. Secondly, God will be praised when all evil is cast into hell because this means deliverance for the saints.

Those that God knew would accept His grace were to be conformed to Jesus. In other words, God has made a promise to make His children holy. That is His purpose and part of what brings Him glory because it is He who makes men holy. Consider the Word of God:

- “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).
- ““Here I am, I have come to do Your will.’ . . . And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:9-10).
- “Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family” (Heb 2:11). Clearly, the point of these verses is to show that God is the one that makes men holy and in this He is glorified.

- “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord”(Eph 3:10-12).
- Who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:8-9).
- In Him we were also chosen, [among many that were called Mat 22:14] having been predestined [to be made holy v. 29] according to the plan [plan of salvation through the cross] of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:11-13).
- “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will-to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves” (Eph 1:4-6). God’s intent was to save those who would be willing to be saved.
- But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you *to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth*” (2 Thess 2:13-14). (Again, it wasn’t God choosing you to be saved but choosing the plan by which you may saved through His Spirit drawing you to choose truth and believe).
- “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Here the word for “appointed” is *tetagmenoi* which means to set, order or appoint. However, it doesn’t mean any foreknowledge of that appointment. There are other words that are used for such an idea. *Protetagmenoi* is used in other places to mean to appoint beforehand or *proorismenoi*, meaning to determine before or predestinate. The verb *tassoo* which is the form used here in Acts is simply to set or be disposed to in the present time, without any premeditation. Therefore, this verse doesn’t mean God was decreeing beforehand who would be saved but, rather that the religious proselytes of verse 43 were setting their mind to believe through the power of the Spirit offered to them. Unlike the Jews who were rejecting the message, the proselytes listened and responded. They were glad to hear that God had appointed beforehand, the allowance of the Gentiles into the covenant promise for the Jews and were set in their minds [*tetagmenoi*] to receive eternal life.

Who is the firstborn of many brothers? Jesus or those He makes holy? No doubt it is Jesus as we read, “And again, when God brings His firstborn into the world, He says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship Him’” (Heb 1:6). Jesus is the Firstborn because He was the first to conquer death and upon His resurrection He was glorified. He is called the firstborn among many brothers because God has made all who follow Christ, sons of God as well: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). Therefore, Jesus is our brother, but He is the firstborn, the oldest Son of the Father. The Scriptures testify, “So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11-12). In Hebrews we read of the saints, “You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful

assembly, to the *church of the firstborn*, whose names are written in heaven” (Heb 12:22-23). The church belongs to the Firstborn, Jesus Christ.

Without believers being conformed to the likeness of Christ in His Sonship, Christ would never be the Firstborn of many brothers, He would remain the only Son of God. But through the cross, God has gained many children and Jesus has gained many brothers. The more children, the more glory.

Those that God foreknew and had been predestined to benefit from the cross were all called by Jesus. None of them came to know Him apart from Him doing the calling and thus salvation can only be credited to Christ. Only true believers are named “the called” or “chosen” as Jesus said, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14, Also Matt 20:16). In Revelation we read, “He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (Rev 17:14). Therefore, not everybody who is called by God will receive Him. It is unfortunate that there are those who God knew would reject His call, however, this is not His desire, but their choice. We read, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants *all men* to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3-5), “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* to Myself” (John 12:31-33), and “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him *all men* might believe” (John 1:7). Taking the Scriptures as a whole in context, we can see that Romans is not talking about predestination as selecting only a few to hear the Gospel. If God doesn’t desire that any man perish, He would not create some just to perish. It is His desire that all men be saved, however, men can choose to live outside of that desire. Paul said to the Jews, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. *Since you reject it* and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46-47).

Those that were called and whom God foreknew would accept the Truth were saved and glorified as Jesus said, “I have not lost one of those You gave Me” (John 18:9).

To recap this is not about predestination for salvation but predestination for being made into the likeness of Christ. God knew ahead of time who would accept the truth and they were predestined for holiness because of Christ’s coming. Why? To bring God glory through many sons. We read in Acts that the plan of salvation through Jesus was predetermined: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). In other words, what was being predestined was Jesus dying on the cross in order to be the firstborn among many brothers making others holy as well. In other words, God knew who would accept Him. For these saved people He had predetermined even before Creation that He would send His Son to make them holy, and to glorify them. Jesus was the foreordained truth and plan. It was Jesus that had to come so that those who would follow God could be conformed to His holiness. Without this plan, there could be no children of God.

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness

or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

What are we to make of God's plan, not only for salvation, but for holiness? Paul answers by saying that God is so powerful and wonderful that as long as He is representing us, nothing or nobody can be against us. The King of kings and Lord of lords is Master to all and slave to none, yet we are privileged to be His sons.

Now if God was willing to allow His own Son to perish for our sakes, certainly He would grant us anything else for our good. Nothing could compare to that sacrifice showing God's love for us. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, He stopped him just before Isaac was killed and said, "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12). There is no greater testimony, nor greater a gift that could be given.

Verse 33 refers back to anyone who thinks that they could go against the sons of God. Those who believe on the Name of the Lord are elected and chosen to do God's will. They are elect to a vocation of Christianity, and if chosen by God, who can blame or accuse them of wrong? If God has justified them no one has the right to go against that authority. Satan tries to accuse believers before God but, because all sins have been wiped away, there is really nothing Satan can do. We read in Revelation of the powerful affect the Gospel has and the consequence of those who try to rebel against God's decisions: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:10-11). It is God that justifies or saves men so that our accusers are silenced. Sometimes men try to justify themselves before this holy God, yet man cannot do so since it is God that the offense is against, only God can justify.

If God is the one who justifies the saints, is it Satan who condemns the unbelievers? Not at all. Satan still accuses them, but God is the judge and jury. Verse 34 tells us that Jesus has earned the right to judge because He was the one that died on the cross to pay for the penalty of sin. Therefore, He has the right to extend the gift He earned to those whom He chooses. But even more than dying, Christ rose from the dead. This too, gave Jesus power and authority as one who conquered death just as Acts tells us, "For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has *given proof* of this to all men *by raising Him from the dead*" (Acts 17:30-31). It was by this resurrection that Christ was given the judgment seat at the right hand of God where He intercedes for those that are being accused. The law condemned us, but Jesus took the condemnation of the law away so that now we only receive the blessing that come from the law, not the curses of it. The resurrection is the final proof of God's authority and approval, by which no man can boast but Jesus. He alone is worthy to judge by merits of His sacrifice and resurrection: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:9). If God is for us, who can be against us. In other words, since Christ died and rose for you, how ridiculous is it to suggest that after doing so, He would abandon you and not

complete the task. Paul tells us that “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).

Many people view Jesus as this loving prophet who wouldn’t send anyone to hell. However, the Bible says Jesus is our Judge: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1). This doesn’t change the fact that He is a loving prophet, but He is much more than that. He is our Prophet, Priest and King. A loving God has to punish sin just as much as a loving judge today has to punish crimes rather than just forgiving them. To do so would make him unjust. The very fact that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God shows His position of authority. It is God’s right hand that works the mighty acts of redemption (Ps 17:7, 20:6, 60:5, 138:7), reveals His power (Ps 45:4) as well as His deliverance (Ps 21:8), and judgment (Ps 44:3, 74:11). It is the right hand that created this world (Isa 48:13), sustains us (Ps 18:35, 63:8), holds and cares for the churches (Rev 1:16), that holds the scroll filled with the wrath of God (Hab 2:16, Rev 5:1), and is raised to make oaths (Rev 10:5). Clearly this is a position of ultimate power (Matt 28:18-19; John 17:2; Eph 1:20-23). Here in verse 34, however, it also states that a main purpose of this position is to use all this might in order to intercede for the saints: “Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them” (Heb 7:24-25).

Being heirs and brothers of Christ, this means we, too, will be judging the world because His authority has been given to us as well. As strange as this sounds, the Bible is clear about it, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life” (1 Cor 6:2-3).

Verse 35 makes it clear that there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love. The quick troubles of everyday life, the longer lasting hardships, persecutions of all sorts, lack of food or clothing, or even the physical dangers that could lead to death will not keep God from loving and taking care of His sons.

Another way of looking at it that can be accurate as well is that none of the trials listed will cause us to stop loving God. As Christians, we take up our cross willingly, just as Christ did. This is not to earn any merit but rather a product of our love. What parent would not lay down his life for his own child due to the great love they have for that child. Likewise, the Spirit of God will pour out His grace upon us in our time of need to withstand any tribulations that might threaten our love of God. To illustrate this truth Paul quotes Ps 44:22 which tells us that these hardships and troubles are to be expected in the Christian life, yet they will do us no harm but rather bring about the good God has planned for us. Paul and others before him were willing to face even death if it meant others might know this truth. Without any care for their own lives, they considered themselves sheep that are meant to be slaughtered for the sake of others. Evil men kill Christians as if they were mere sheep, who were of no harm to anyone but rather gentle creatures. As we said earlier, there is a cost of showing mercy. This seems to almost contradict his earlier statement that no one could be against God’s people. But the truth is still that not even death can separate us from God’s love. When Paul was being persecuted, God was there even though all others had abandoned him: “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it” (2 Tim 4:17). Through suffering Peter tells

us we are not separated from God's love: "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed" (1 Peter 3:14). Even in death God never forsakes His children, which is why Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (Luke 12:4-5). There can be no doubt that even though Christians are as sheep to be slaughtered God remains with them and His reward overshadows anything of the flesh or material world. We can proclaim with the Psalmist, "The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; He is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies" (Ps 118:6-7).

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

Chapter eight closes by reiterating the fact that in all the trials previously listed, we are even *more* than conquerors. Not only do we win the battle through Jesus, but we receive glory beyond our imaginations as well. Paul said to the Corinthians, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor 4:17-18). Often in battle the victor may win but suffer a great loss to achieve that victory. For the Christian, however, nothing is lost at all, even in death we gain more than this life could offer. Our suffering produces glory and a closer relationship to our Lord, and our persecutions produce blessings. There is nothing but more to gain in Christ, and thus, we are more than just conquerors. Paul reflects on this when he says, "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort" (2 Cor 1:5-7). Certainly this truth has been seen in the countless martyrs that went to their death singing hymns and praises to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The source of our victory is not of ourselves but only through Christ, "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "I can do everything *through Him* who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13).

We can lose our physical life or struggle through our current life but the end result is the same – victory in Christ. Fallen angels or demons cannot change this outcome. This is not referring to good angels because they were created as, "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14) so surely they wouldn't hinder us from God's love. The Scriptures tell us there are bad angels that will be judged: "Do you not know that we will judge angels" (1 Cor 6:3)? When Jesus confronted an evil spirit He said, "Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41). Therefore, evil angels must be what Paul is referring to here. The Jews have always viewed fallen angels as having different ranks or powers

with Satan as their leader. The demons seem to be rulers of kingdoms and have more dominion or principality. Consider the following verse:

- “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the *powers of this dark world* and against the *spiritual forces of evil* in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).
- “And having disarmed *the powers and authorities*, He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15).
- “Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all *dominion, authority and power*” (1 Cor 15:24).
- “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘*The kingdom of the world* has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Rev 11:15).

Nothing going on in the world around us or any future event or power of any magnitude can separate us from the love of God. Neither the height of a wealthy life, heaven or power, nor the depth of despair, poverty or sheol itself will stop the love of Christ. The point being is that God’s promises of His predetermined plan of salvation is fixed and sure. Praise be to God!

Romans 9

Because chapters 9-11 are so often misunderstood I believe it is extremely important to understand them in context with one another. In fact, understanding these three chapters lays a foundation to understand all of the book of Romans. Without grasping the meaning of these chapters, the others can be easily interpreted out of context. If at all possible, it is best to read these three chapters in one setting. If it can’t be done, be sure to go back when finished and at least read the chapters by themselves without the commentary. A general outline that we will be seeing follows:

Romans 9- Will show Israel is God’s Elect.
Romans 10- Will show Israel as Rejected.
Romans 11- Will show Israel as Restored.

9:1 I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Paul is about to bring everything he has been talking about together to explain God’s plan for Israel and the church. Up to this point he has made a solid case for the

Jewish people having fallen into sin just as much as the Gentile world. He revealed that God could be clearly seen through the creation and no man would be excused for denying His existence. He has also shown that though the Jews have tried to obey the law, they have fallen short of it and ultimately fall into the same condemnation as the Gentiles. Finally, he gave encouragement by showing that Jesus fulfilled the law in our stead and has left His Spirit to live in those whom He has made to be children of God. Now, however, he is going to turn to the Jews and show them that they have been elected for God's purpose and that He is not finished with them.

Paul begins to explain that the truth he is about to share is from Christ and the Spirit. He isn't going to be trying to flatter anyone, nor offend them with his interpretations, but give the pure Word of truth. It is almost as if he needs to give this precursor because what he is about to tell us is going to be hard to believe. Yet, his conscience is clear because it isn't his truth but the Truth.

Paul was greatly troubled to the point of righteous anguish over the response of the Jew to the Gospel. The word used in verse three for "cursed" does not necessarily mean damned to hell, but rather given over to destruction. With that said however, the fact that he would be cut off from Christ would mean that he would be damned to hell. Paul was willing to give his own eternal life and be destroyed if he could make the Jews believe. This is the same sentiment for Israel that was illustrated by Moses, "But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written" (Ex 32:32). In a sense, Paul did give his life for them as he always went first to the Jew before preaching to the Gentiles. Eventually, Paul was martyred for his faith but even through all the tribulations caused by the Jews Paul had no bitterness towards them as he expressed in Rome: "But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar-not that I had any charge to bring against my own people" (Acts 28:19-20). Although Paul was never cut off from Christ, if it would have benefited the Jew so that they might know Christ, he would have been willing to be cut off. If Paul and Moses were willing to serve in such a Christ-like manner, should we not also be willing to give up all for others? I can only pray that God would instill such selfless love in my heart.

Verse four identifies Paul as a Jew because his own race were the people of Israel. Lest anyone think that God was finished with the Jew, Paul had to give the truth of the advantages of being a Jew once more (Rom 3:1). Paul had just told us that we are all now sons of God and co-heirs with Christ because of the cross, however, here he tells us the Jews have the first right as the adoption as sons. It was for the Jew that Jesus came to die, and He only offered the Gospel to others after He was rejected. This is why Jesus first commanded His disciples to go only to the Jews, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). He told the Samaritan woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 15:24). It was Israel that was destined to be heirs. God told Moses, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession" (Deut 7:5-6).

Paul just told us in chapter eight about the great glory that comes from being adopted as sons and now here again in verse four he says that it was for the Jew to receive divine glory. Why? Because the covenant God made with Abraham back in Genesis 15 was made for his descendants, the Hebrews. In Genesis 14:13 we read, "One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew." This is the first time

“Hebrew” appears in Scripture and is the word “*Abri*” in the Hebrew language which is very close to Abraham. God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is called the God of Israel 203 times in the Bible, yet never is He called the God of Ishmael or the God of America etc. God hasn’t changed and His promises remain. He is still the God of Israel. Israel was the first adopted son and we are only beneficiaries of that adoption, “Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is My firstborn son’” (Ex 4:22-23).

The covenant with Abraham was only the first of others (Deut 29) that would yet follow, but all stemming back to the one given to Abraham for the purpose of making Israel the chosen ones of God. God didn’t give the law to the Gentile world, but to the Jews because this law was to reveal Him to them. “He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws” (Ps 147:19-20). We also read in Deuteronomy, “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to Him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today” (Deut 4:6-8)?

I think it is important to examine this Law a bit further before moving on. Today Judaism (not Messianic or completed Jews) focuses on Moses (A type of priest, prophet and king) rather than Christ. For a Jew the role of Moses was to point to the Law and God. Jews call him *Moshe Rabanu* (Ra-bay-new) or Rabi Moses (the first and greatest rabbi). Virtually everything in Judaism points to Moses and Sinai. Moses was alive around 1400 BC when this legal system came about to connect the people to God. Isn’t it interesting that the calendar has no basis for a week? The Sabbath was given by the Lord to connect the people to God. In ancient days if you didn’t work you didn’t eat so this forced the people to trust the Lord for providence. The fact that this Law connected you to God and that they were very humane rules is unique to all other legal systems throughout history. There were 613 laws with each one having a purpose. There were Laws in the Torah for every part of life: family, criminal, civil, inheritance, property, international, commerce, and agricultural laws. The goal of all of them was to bring a fair and just society.

The Law was a result of grace. For example, Exodus 20 introduces the 10 commandments. Why? Because God had just delivered them from Egypt, and now as a “consequence” they had to do such and such. Likewise, Jesus said, “if you love Me you will do what I say.”

Much of the Law can be found in Deuteronomy where we see that it was laid out like a covenant treaty of grace. This was a common thing in this time period of history. Archaeology shows that when a new king conquered a people the following things were given by the king:

- 1) Introduction –He explained what happened. “You came here and settled so many years ago but we have come to take over.”
- 2) Recites historical relationship with people. “ Your fathers inherited this land but our fathers were mistreated etc.”
- 3) Stipulations – new requirements and laws. “Because we conquered you, now you must do this.”

- 4) Blessings and Curses – obeying or disobeying. “If you follow these rules you will have peace, but if you rebel you will die.”
- 5) Oath was taken to obey. “We promise to abide by these rules.”
- 6) Succession- Explained what happened when a new king came.
- 7) Final reading and location of the copies. Usually two copies of the covenant were made, one for the people and one for the king.

It isn't a coincidence that the Law in Deuteronomy was laid out in the same pattern as a covenant of peace.

Deut. 1 Introduction.

Deut. 1-4 Relationship between God and His people.

Deut. 5-26 Stipulations were given.

Deut. 27-28 Blessings and curses pronounced.

Deut. 30 Oath was taken to obey.

Deut. 31 Succession (When Moses dies the new king, Joshua, would lead).

Deut. 31 Final reading and location of the two copies of the law.

Interestingly, the Ten Commandments are often viewed as 5 on one tablet and 5 on the other, however, it is most probable that there were 10 on both. One copy was for people and the other copy for God. Both copies were placed in the Tabernacle or Temple.

The point in explaining all of this is to show that God gave this law to the Jew to have a relationship with them. It was a covenant of peace and grace. However, it was given with the full predetermined knowledge that they would not be able to keep it. This is why it was predetermined that Christ would come to fulfill it for them. To them belong the promises (v. 4). To the Jew the Temple Worship was given in order to have a relationship with them.

Verse five continues to show that all the patriarchs that the entire Bible takes the time to trace the ancestry of was of Jewish origin. From these roots, the Savior came in human form, yet being fully God. For this reason, God is to be praised forever. For this reason as well, the Jew should not be looked down upon, but rather we should be giving thanks to God for the Jew for it is from them that we have benefited in Christ. This truth will continue to shine forth through chapter 11.

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Some might think that because so many Jews rejected the Gospel that God's word and covenant had failed (see Rom 3:3). This is impossible for an infallible God. Many commentators misinterpret these verses because their culture has been used to interpret the Scriptures, not the Scriptures themselves. Matthew Henry, one of my favorite

commentators, is unfortunately an example of this when it comes to this chapter. He regards the meaning of these verses to “prove that the rejection of the Jews, by the establishment of the gospel dispensation, did not at all invalidate the word of God's promise to the patriarchs.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul was a Jew as were thousands of the early church. God did not reject the Jews when the Gospel was instituted. Paul has been saying this throughout Romans already yet the personal feelings and the poor view many have of the Jews is used as a means of interpretation here. It is true that some Jews rejected God, however, God is faithful to His promise throughout all time. God's plan in His promise to the patriarchs is in full motion.

Not everyone who descended from Israel (Jacob) are Israel. First of all, Abraham had Ishmael and Isaac. The line of Ishmael has become the Muslims of today. Secondly, Isaac had Jacob and Esau. Esau became the Edomites who were enemies of Israel and were later wiped out completely as the book of Obadiah predicted. We discussed in great detail in Romans 2:28 that a Jew is one inwardly, however, this is not what Paul is talking about here.

Verse 7 continues the same line of thought but explains why this happened this way. Ultimately it is all about the Genesis 15 covenant that God was indeed faithful to. As we just saw, Abraham had two sons from Sarah, both had directly descended from him. However, the children of Ishmael (and the other children from Keturah as seen in Gen 25:1-2) would not be reckoned as Abraham's children. Only the children of the promise would be regarded as Abraham's offspring. Clearly, Paul is not talking here about inward Jewishness of faith, but outward physical ancestry.

Verses 8-9 are still talking about these children of the promise. In Genesis we see that Sarah was mistreating Hagar and wanted to get rid of her and Ishmael. God comes to Abraham and says, “Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant [Ishmael] into a nation also, because he is your offspring” (Gen 21:12-13). In other words, the promise wasn't for Ishmael. It seems strange reading this in Genesis to see that God would tell Abraham to send his son Ishmael away, however, God had good reason. Ishmael was the son from Abraham's own plan to fulfill God's promises. Isaac was the promised son that God said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son” (Gen 18:10). Anyone under Abraham's covering was to be under his covenant. Since Ishmael was not under the covenant, he had to go. “I will establish My covenant with him [Isaac] as an everlasting covenant for *his descendants* after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers [but he is not under the covenant]” (Gen 17:19-20). God did bless Ishmael just as He promised, however, it was apart from the covenant. In fact, when he was born God gave this prophecy of Ishmael and his descendants, “He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers” (Gen 16:12). This is seen being fulfilled to this day as the Muslims war against each other and especially against the Jew. In fact, according to the Muslim faith, Muhammad cannot return until the last Jew is wiped off the face of the earth. There is true hostility between the Jacob and Ishmael to this day.

Spiritually, these two children represent the law and the Gospel as Galatians four clearly explains. It all shows that one child was born of the spirit and the other of the flesh. Romans 8 has just gone through the difference of living in the Spirit versus living

in the flesh. “Now you, *brothers, like Isaac*, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the *ordinary way* [Ishmael] persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit [Isaac]. It is the same now [the law is hostile to one living under the Gospel]. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son’” (Gal 4:28-30). Indeed, God had good reason in having Abraham send his son of the flesh away. The promise would come through the Spirit and the covenant would be fulfilled through him only.

What we are seeing here is the true meaning of the doctrine of election that is misunderstood today. Israel is God’s true elect. Election is not a means of being saved, it is about vocation, not salvation. We elect presidents to do a job, likewise, God has elected Israel for a specific purpose. Israel, as a nation does fulfill that purpose and God will remain faithful to His promise forever. We read of this covenant discussed in these verses, where God says, “I will establish My covenant as an *everlasting covenant* between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole *land of Canaan*, where you are now an alien, I will give as an *everlasting possession* to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:6-8). This covenant is everlasting and also the land of Canaan is to go along with the covenant. Today, the land of Canaan does not belong to Israel so obviously, the covenant has not been brought to full fulfillment yet. Remember, this does not mean non-Jews do not become elect, nor does it mean that every descendent of Jacob would accept their calling as we will discuss in the next two chapters. However, one thing is for sure as seen in these verses. The covenant was made to and for the Jew, not the Gentile. Gentiles will simply be welcomed into the covenant of the Jew, which ultimately was part of God’s plan. For now just recall Paul’s earlier words, “Therefore, the *promise comes by faith*, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring-*not only* to those who are of the law but *also to those who are of the faith* of Abraham” (Rom 4:16).

10 Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls-she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Not only was the promise stated to follow the lineage of Isaac, it was only to be followed through Isaac and Rebekah’s son Jacob. In the case of Ishmael there were two mothers involved, however, with Jacob it was the same mother. These verses are often misinterpreted and taken out of context. The intent of this chapter is to trace the covenant for the people of Israel. Really, the intent of the Old Testament was to follow this covenant, which ultimately was pointing to Jesus Christ who came for Israel. It was this covenant made to Abraham through which the Gentiles would be blessed as well. Speaking to the Jews Peter said, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ, who *has been appointed for you*-even Jesus. He must remain in heaven *until the time comes for God to restore everything*, as He *promised long ago* through his holy prophets. . . Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have

foretold these days. And you are *heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers*. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring *all peoples on earth will be blessed*.' When God raised up His servant, He sent Him *first to you to bless you* by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:19-26).

Verse 11 explains that before Jacob or Esau had done anything good to merit the covenant or even anything bad to not deserve the covenant, Rebekah was told that the Esau would serve Jacob. Even today some wonder why God would elect the Jew to bring forth the Gospel when so many of them have rejected Him. First of all, more have accepted Jesus as the Messiah than most people realize. Secondly, it isn't about how good or bad they are, but rather God's choice and purpose regardless of any merit they have.

The purpose of this being foretold was so that God's purpose in election would stand. This is where the misunderstanding comes. Too many view election as meaning salvation. Election is the vocation God called Israel to do. They were to keep the covenant so that through them, "all peoples on earth would be blessed." Jacob was one of the elect because it was through him the covenant was traced. Esau was not elect according to these verses. This does not mean that Esau was or wasn't a saved man, it simply means that he wasn't under the covenant. Esau received and treated Jacob warmly when they saw each other after being apart for 20 years (Gen 33). It is very possible that Esau had a relationship with the Lord, however, his descendant, as a whole, would not. The same is true of Ishmael. In the Old Testament and even today, there are descendants from Ishmael that followed or are following the Lord even though they were not under the covenant. Does this mean they aren't saved because they weren't elect? Not at all, it simply means they weren't elected to bring forth the covenant to all nations.

Today, there are some who think that if one is following and obeying Christ he must be one of God's elect. This is not entirely true. Election wasn't determined by doing good or bad but it was intended to fulfill God's purpose in bringing forth the Savior through the line of Jacob. There were many in the line of Jacob that were still part of the elect lineage and rejected God, yet God used them for His purpose anyway. This is "God's purpose in election" so that the Savior might bring salvation to all men. Timothy wrote, "This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, *who is the Savior of all men*, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:9-10). On the other hand, those that are following Christ, become elect in that they are now *called* to bring that Gospel to the world. As we will discuss in coming chapters, Gentile believers are grafted into the covenant tree and become elect as well. God's purpose is being fulfilled in that through the Jew, blessings are coming to all nations.

When God says Jacob I loved and Esau I hated in verse 13, He isn't talking about them as individuals but as nations. If God was talking about individuals it would make these verses false because Esau was never subjected to Jacob. In fact, if anything, the opposite was true (Gen 32:4). Instead, we see the nation of Esau would be enemies of Israel (1 Sam 21, 1 Kings 11:4) and the covenant. Yet God also said, "Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD" (Deut 23:7-8). Malachi records God saying this long after Jacob and Esau had died, but it is clearly in reference to the nation of the Edomites: "'I have loved you,' says the LORD. But you ask, 'How have You loved us?' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?'

the LORD says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals’ (Mal 1:2-3). Jacob’s descendants had the temple worship, the covenants, and the patriarchs from whom Christ came, yet Esau’s descendants lived apart from all those blessings. Some of Jacob’s descendants rejected their calling and some of Esau’s descendants joined Jacob’s calling. Thus, the Bible in context gives us the intent and meaning of this phrase, “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.”

Finally, we must examine the word “hated.” This is not to say that God literally hated Esau as an individual either. The word is used here in the sense of a preference much like a child might say, “I hate chocolate ice-cream.” He doesn’t really hate it, but he would prefer vanilla. The Jews often used this kind of comparison with words like love and hate. Jesus said in Matthew, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:25-27). This doesn’t mean we are to literally hate our parents because that would contradict what Jesus says about loving our enemies (Mat 5:43, Rom 12:20). Instead, Jesus was telling us that we must not love our family over Him. We should put Christ first, above and beyond anything or anyone else if we are to follow Him. Other examples of this can be seen in Mat 6:24, and Prov 13:24. Therefore, here in Romans I believe God was saying that He had preference and priority for the line of Jacob. God’s love means His favor is upon you. This is why they received God’s special protection and providence while the Edomites did not.

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 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 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Is God unjust? Certainly not. Abraham once said to God, “Far be it from You to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right” (Gen 18:24-25). However, it would only be natural for people to think that God is being unjust in choosing the line of Jacob over all the other people on earth so Paul addresses this in these verses. As usual, they are often taken out of context so as to make them say that God can choose to send some to hell if it is His will. However, a close look at verse 15 shows us that God told Moses that He will have mercy on whomever He wants. Likewise, He will also have compassion on whomever He wants. Both mercy and compassion are good things. He isn’t saying some receive mercy and others damnation. These words were given to Moses back in Exodus 33:19 when God was revealing His glory to Moses. The context shows that God could choose to show His favor to whomever He wanted and give His mercy to whomever as well. Even though there wasn’t a man on earth who deserved God’s mercy, He can give it to whoever He wants.

Verse 16 reiterates what was said in earlier verses. It isn’t a matter of man’s desire or efforts to be called by God. One can’t be good enough to deserve or earn God’s love

and attention. It is simply because God IS love that He gives them mercy and compassion despite their behavior. Remember as well the context of Romans 9 is to show Israel was God's elect, despite any merit of their own. While some argue this was unfair Paul tells us in Galatians that there was a purpose, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal 3:8-9). Even though Israel hardened their hearts, God's purpose in saving men would come about because of it. God even foretold that He would offer His mercy to the Gentiles: "I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. To a nation that did not call on My name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (Isa 65:1). Again, it was not because of any good deed or any desire of their own that God did this.

To illustrate this truth, an example is used in verse 17 of Pharaoh. Pharaoh had every opportunity to believe in the God of Israel but rejected Him instead. Some might say that this shows God failed in Pharaoh's life. Not so! First of all, it was Pharaoh who failed to accept God's mercy, not God's unwillingness for him to receive it. Secondly, God uses all things to bring Him glory. Those who refuse to accept God's love will be used to bring that love to others. God allowed Pharaoh to be raised up to his position of authority despite his ungodliness in order that God would be able to show His power in the Exodus event. It was through the ten plagues that God's Name was spread to every nation and, even to this day, is known throughout the earth.

Verse 18 closes by referring back to the fact that God will show mercy to whomever He desires, but He will also harden the hearts of those who continue to reject His grace as did Pharaoh. Evidence of this is shown in Exodus 8:15 and 8:32 where Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It was only upon this continued stubbornness that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in 9:12 and 9:34. In either case of God showing mercy or hardening a heart, He is glorified. The same truth is seen with the history of Israel. They willingly rejected their God so that He eventually hardened the hearts of His chosen nation. "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-and I would heal them." Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about Him. Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in Him" (John 12:40-42).

19 one of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

So why does God hold us accountable if He hardens our hearts? First of all, God only does so in His foreknowledge of our rejection. He knows when a man will not humble himself and repent. Therefore, He might as well use these people to gain glory. The argument used is that nobody can resist God's will, however, this is man's argument, not Gods. God is a gentleman and doesn't force His mercy or grace upon anyone. It is a free gift.

Another point is that man, no matter how hard he may try, cannot thwart God's purpose for His covenant. Daniel said, "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: 'What have you done'" (Dan 4:35)?

Paul's answer to this false argument is that we are mere men and have no right to question God since we are His creation. He knows what He is doing in His omniscient knowledge. God knows the heart of man and if He knows that this man will never accept the grace offered, He will withhold His mercy.

The answer also reveals that God created man with different roles and purposes. Just as a potter can make certain pots for noble purposes while others are ordinary dishes, God has made every human being with their own purpose as well. Paul addresses this later in Romans when he says, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (Rom 12:4-6). Every man will be used for God's purposes. The more humble and willing to be used they are, the greater their purpose may be. In other cases, God has created some with different abilities to be used for greater purposes as well. Even a non-Christian like Pharaoh was raised up to a very noble position for a great godly purpose. If God chose to use his rejection and raise him up only to later destroy him, we have no right to question or doubt God's wisdom (Isa 45:9, 29:16, 64:8). God has the same right to do with individuals what He does with nations.

22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory- 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

For those still not convinced of God's all knowing and all powerful nature further explanation was needed. The words "what if" don't imply that this is what God did, but allows for it to be true. However, the context implies that he is simply trying to get those who doubt God's mercy because of His judgments to stop and think it through.

Though at times God does show his wrath to make His power known, as He did with Pharaoh. He also was very patient with Pharaoh, the object of his wrath, who was being prepared for destruction. Because Pharaoh wouldn't humble himself, God began raising him up in power so that the true power of God might be displayed in his destruction. However, there is more than just God's display of power that was the goal with Pharaoh. Perhaps through destruction of the ungodly, mercy is shown to the godly. It was through the ten plagues that Israel (true object of His mercy) saw the amazing glory of God. God had called Israel years earlier and had promised them glory through His covenant (Gen 17). He had prepared them in advance and knew that He would reveal his glory and mercy to them by using a hard-hearted Pharaoh. Therefore, in judgment, not only is justice served to those who deserve it (Gentiles), but mercy is also given to those who don't deserve it (Jews). For no man deserves God's mercy, but anyone who repents and humbles themselves have it.

Some will use Matthew as a reference for the objects of His mercy prepared in advance: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. . . Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt 25:34,41). However, in Matthew God is speaking of the kingdoms of heaven and hell whereas here in Romans he is speaking about the nation of Israel. These are two completely different things. In Timothy we read, "But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim 1:8-10). Here again we see that it is Jesus who was purposed to give grace before creation began. The Gospel was predetermined before creation. God knew that He would send His son (Gen 3:15) so that all who would believe could inherit eternal life. The means by which we inherit eternal life comes was predetermined, not the eternal life.

Though the covenant was given to the Jew, there were many Gentile Egyptians that believed in God as well. They, like Ruth and Rahab received mercy and the same mercy is available to the Gentiles today. For more on this look back at the bulleted verses in the section on Romans 8:28-30.

Some try to make these verses speak to individual salvation. Again, this is not the context of this chapter. God is clearly referring to the Gentile and Jewish nations as the following verses make clear.

25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," 26 and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" 27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. 28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." 29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

These verses clearly show the context of the previous verses was to show that Gentiles were receiving mercy. Hosea recorded God's promise in 2:23 that the Gentiles who were not His covenant people would be called His people. Those whom were not His special loved ones would become loved ones.

Verse 26 continues a quote from Hosea 1:10 which shows us that in the very place the Gentiles were rejected, they would be accepted. It is no coincidence that God had chosen Abraham and had him nearly sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. When Isaac, a Christ figure, was about to be slain an angel appeared and stopped Abraham. The angel gave God's message saying, "Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me" (Gen 22:17-18). It was on this very mountain that God had confirmed His covenant to the Jewish nation. Mount Moriah is the very hill on which Jesus died as well, welcoming the Gentile nation into the Jewish covenant. It was the "very place" that

the Gentiles were left out, that they became “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).

Isaiah had a similar message concerning the Jew in 10:22. The size of the nation didn't matter. Even though they became a great nation like the sand by the sea, just as God promised Abraham they would (Gen 22:17), only a few of them would be saved. God's promise was to the nation of Israel, not to each individual. This does not mean each individual didn't have the same opportunity if they believed and followed God, it simply means not every one was going to be saved just because they were of the nation of Israel.

Only a few among the nation would be saved because God's judgment on earth would be quick and final. Though God is patient, when the eleventh hour comes, it is too late. God had warned Isaiah in 1:9 that if it wasn't for His faithfulness to His covenant, all of Israel would have been destroyed just as those of the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were. However, God was faithful and in His mercy kept sending His prophets and preserving the faithful individuals to witness to the nation of Israel, those whom He prepared in advance for glory. The same has held true to this very day where we see a number of completed Jews, that is those who accept Jesus as their Messiah. A remnant has been kept and the numbers are still growing as we will discuss in later chapters.

30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. 32 Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." 33 As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

To review this chapter, Paul closes by answering the question of why Israel had been denied righteousness. The Gentiles did not seek God out, yet God sought them out, knowing that the Gentiles would receive Him by faith. The Gentiles knew they were sinners and were not trying to justify themselves. They knew they needed help so when Christ showed them the way, they were eager to take it.

On the other hand, Israel did not seek the God of righteousness, but rather a LAW of righteousness. They were following a path of self-righteousness by observing the law God gave them. They didn't see a need for a savior, but rather only a deliverer from their enemies. They kept waiting for the Messiah to come and save them from the Romans, not from themselves. The God of righteousness is found by faith but the law of righteousness is pursued by works.

The Jews tripped up on the Messiah who was the one who did all the work for them. After all, it was always said to be God's covenant to them, not their covenant to God. The law was intended to show people their sins, yet the Jew used it to puff himself up with pride and self-righteousness. This concept was not foreign to those in Old Testament times, it was just ignored, “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). One has to realize he is a sinner before he would look for salvation and the Old Testament clearly showed an understanding of sin: “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is

the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him” (Ps 32:1-2). Job said, “Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God” (Job 9:2)? David wrote, “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared” (Ps 130:3-4). The Jews of Jesus day, however, had become so Hellenized that they pursued their own righteousness and thought they had obtained it.

Verse 33 quotes the prophecies of Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 where Mount Zion (Jerusalem) would have a solid foundational stone laid down. Ephesians clearly tells us who this stone is since we are, “members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19-20). Some would stumble on this stone, not being able to believe that salvation could be obtained without works and without Jesus. This hang up would cause them to fall. Yet to everyone who would trust in Jesus as the means of righteousness, would find it.

It is important to make the distinction between the Jews as a nation and the individual Jews of Jesus’ day as well. We must remember that a vast number of Jews did believe in Jesus and followed Him. However, because of the Greek culture influencing so many Jews, there were also many blinded to the truth of God’s Word. Through all of this God never rejected the Jews as individuals, but as a nation He would reject them for a time because their leaders were corrupt. The Gentiles had been welcomed into the covenant promise because they had been prepared to receive it, but today, the church leaders have become so far removed from the truth of the Bible, that it is their turn to be given over to blindness. Ironically, today it is the Gentile church who feels as if they do not sin because they believe in Jesus. Their belief has become a means of self-righteousness, yet they have no relationship with Jesus. Just as the Jews viewed their doctrine as a means of salvation, rather than the God of that doctrine, so, too, Gentiles have faith in their doctrine over the author of it. Faith isn’t a name it and claim it means of salvation. Faith is a trusting relationship where we surrender to God and the Holy Spirit as we live with, for and in Him. So many use the Gospel as merely a license to sin just as the Jews used their nationality as a connection to God. The Gentiles are pursuing God as the Jews did thinking that He can be found through a law of righteousness. If you pray and go to church that makes one a Christian. Well it doesn’t anymore than going to the synagogue and obeying all the Jewish laws made one a child of Abraham. Jude warned us, “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 3-4). As we will see in the following two chapters the time of rejection for the Jewish nation is almost over, yet the time for the Gentile’s rejection (as a nation, not individually) is soon beginning.

Romans 10

10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to

God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

In chapter nine Paul wasn't trying to say that he was against the Jews, in fact, he prayed for them to see Christ as the Messiah. The way and is the only way a man may be saved. It wasn't for a lack of zeal for God that they didn't believe, but rather that they were zealous for their traditions and self-righteous acts.

Verse three explains that the Jews did not know the righteousness of God that many of their forefathers like Abraham and David knew. No, the Scribes and the Pharisees had become corrupt and the pride of their own deeds and lineage caused them to be blinded to the truth. All they needed to do was to submit to God's free gift of grace that brings righteousness, yet they felt that they needed control of their own eternity.

Verse four shows that the Jews were determining their salvation by the number of laws they kept. However, Christ was the end of a law-based system and the beginning of a faith based relationship with God. The law was given to the Jews and this made them proud and exclusive. The faith based system was open to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike.

5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that is by 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 deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Paul goes back to quote the great Rabbi Moses in Leviticus 18:5 to show that the law would fail to bring about righteousness. The Jews saw this verse as saying, "The man who does these things will live in them to eternal life." Simply meaning that those who obeyed God would obtain eternal life and then continue, by God's grace, to obey the law into eternity. The problem is that a man who obeys the law will live and be judged by their ability to obey the rules of that law. As the first few chapters of Romans has shown us, nobody can obey the law perfectly and if we break the least of these commands we break them all (Mat 5:19). If only we could obey the law, we would find perfect peace and happiness.

There is an answer, however, because the righteousness that comes from having faith in Jesus is determined simply by what Jesus has done. Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly *in our stead* and also took the punishment for all the times we had already broken that law. Jesus will bring that perfect peace and happiness. It is through His grace and Spirit that empowers us to obey Him because when we enter eternal life, His Spirit

obeys for us. It is through Christ that we can do all things and are viewed as saints of God. It is through Christ that we are presented as holy and blameless. Therefore, as the Jews understood Moses as saying, the man who obeys the law will live by these laws eternally through Jesus.

Verses 6-8 takes this concept further. This is a quote from Deuteronomy 30:11-14 where we see the context was Moses telling the people that the understanding of this faith and obedience wasn't in some far-off country, way up in the heavens or across the seas somewhere, but that it was right with them in God's presence. This is what Moses said, "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it" (Deut 30:11-14). Taking this within the context that it was written we see that Paul is saying here in Romans that one doesn't need to go to heaven to bring Christ down to earth to understand this truth, nor does he need to descend to the depth of the seas [as if we could] to bring Christ up from the dead to understand what faith is.

Though the meaning there seems clear, it doesn't fit perfectly, nor is it an exact quote of Deuteronomy. I believe the reason is because Moses wrote that in reference to obeying the law, yet Paul says, "BUT, the righteousness that comes from faith says . . ." Moses' quote of understanding the righteousness of the law was used to illustrate the truth of the Gospel, but using new covenant glasses to understand it. Indeed, the Gospel isn't found by some teacher in another country, in outer space, or the depth of the seas, it is near us through the Spirit of God. However, there is another possible truth seen here.

A man that lives by faith and understands what Jesus has done can not judge the salvation of another because we can't see into the hearts of men. A person who understands the Gospel won't say this person is going to heaven because look at how good he is. This would mean that works are a means of salvation and we bring the work that Christ did for us, down to our level of righteousness. In other words, we bring Christ down.

Likewise, one can't say this person is descending into the depths of hell because look at his lack of good works or the number of his specific sins. This means works is the measure for salvation and it says that Christ's death, which was the penalty already paid for these sins, was meaningless and ineffectual. It takes all that Christ did on that cross away from Him and He no longer receives the glory. In other words, it brings Christ up from the dead in the sense that his death meant nothing.

Verse 8 shows us what faith truly is and that it revolves around the Word (which is Jesus, the Word which became flesh) that is near, even within us. He is in our hearts and in our mouths. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21). God has put His word into our mouths just as He promised He would, "'This is My covenant with them,' says the LORD. 'My Spirit, who is on you, and My words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever' says the LORD" (Isa 59:21). The word is also in our hearts and minds as He promised, "'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after

that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people'" (Jer 31:33). There can be no doubt that the Word is not only near, but also lives within those who believe.

Faith consists of two things, believing and speaking. We confess that we believe Jesus with our mouths as we call upon Him to be saved. We also believe what we confess with our hearts and accept that God raised Jesus from the dead, giving us new life with Him as Paul describe back in Romans chapter 6:5-10. This confession and believe bring faith and salvation as Christ lives in you. It is not the result of the works you do or don't do, but merely your confession of true belief. Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven" (Matt 10:32-33). One can profess Christ and not truly believe in Him as Savior, thus not have the power-working Word and Spirit within them. Likewise, like Satan, people can believe in Jesus, but not profess Him as their Lord. In fact, everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord and will bow before Him, they just won't accept Him as their Savior: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). True faith consists of both believing and confessing the Name of Jesus. This is one reason why it is not good to keep your faith to yourself. We should be out professing His name to everyone we meet.

Verse 10 reiterates that it is the fact that we believe in what Jesus has done and the price He paid that justifies us. It is also our confession of what is in our heart that saves us. We must first be justified before we can be saved. Belief comes before profession. This also shows that it is the Spirit of God that moves people to believe. He offers His Spirit to all but not all will accept Him to believe. Today, we have an idea that we first profess our desire and then belief comes, however, these verses are saying that we must first have the Spirit to work faith in our hearts before we can profess that faith. This is what it means when the Scriptures say "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44-45).

Verses 11-13 show that ANYONE who trusts in God will not be put to shame (Isa 28:16, see also Joel 2:32, 1 Cor 1:2, Acts 2:21). This means that all people have the opportunity to use the Spirit entrusted to them. Again, the context of these chapters is talking about Jews and Gentiles. It was previously assumed that the Gospel was only available for the Jew. Paul has been making a case that this Gospel is now available for the Gentile who believes. Anyone, Jew or Greek can believe, profess, and receive salvation. Even though the Gentiles did not follow all the rules and regulations that the Jews did, it did not depend upon our works and actions, but rather the work of Christ. Though there were many differences in the behaviors of a Jew and Gentile there is no difference between them when it comes to the means of salvation. The same Lord died for all sins for everyone, everywhere and He will pour out His blessings upon anyone who accepts His call by faith and responds to that faith by themselves calling to God. As the Scriptures declare, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men-the testimony given in its proper time" (1 Tim 2:5-6).

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" 16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. 18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

If one must call on the Lord to be saved the question Paul asks is how can this happen if they don't believe. The answer is they won't; especially if they haven't even heard of the Gospel and they certainly won't hear if Christians aren't doing their jobs and sharing it. Christians won't share it if they haven't been sent to do so. However, like the prophets of the Old Testament who were sent by God to deliver a message, every Christian is called today to share the love of Christ. As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (Matt 9:37-38). Yet even though the workers are few, the message of Christ has gone throughout the world. The problem is, even though the message is heard, it is not believed, "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (Heb 4:2).

It is also important to understand that the context of these verses seems to be referring more to the Jew here. How could God blame the Jew if they were not familiar with Christ? They had only been told of God and the law, yet if faith in Jesus is what saves a person, how can they believe? As we examine these verses you will see that the Old Testament, and even creation itself, spoke of Christ.

Anyone who obeys the Great Commission is beautiful, not only in the eyes of the sender, but also the receiver. The feet of the evangelist are beautiful because they walk the walk as they talk the talk. Signifying this truth, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples before they went out to share the Gospel. The beautiful feet imagery is taken from Isaiah 52:7 and Nahum 1:15. The context in those verses reveals Israel's deliverance from Babylon and is a foreshadowing of the Lord's return to Zion. Indeed, the Lord is going to bring good news to the people of Israel once more as Romans is soon going to tell us. In the meantime, however, we see that Israel has been rejected to allow the Gentiles access to this covenant as well.

Verse 16 changes things a bit. Even though there were those with beautiful feet sharing God's Word to Israel, calling them to repentance, not all Israel accepted it. We know that Israel was called and elect, yet now all the elect received the message. Why? God is a gentleman and He doesn't force Himself on people, He merely offers His mercy and grace and allows people to freely choose or reject it. Many of the Israelites fell in love with what the world had to offer and chose to reject the good news.

Isaiah spoke of this rejection (53:1) when he was frustrated over the Israelites not believing the Word. Just as the contextual references to the beautiful feet were pointing to the Lord's second coming on Zion, the context of Isaiah 53 is of the coming Messiah. Christ is the main object of the beautiful feet and the one giving the message here. Isaiah

had said that the reason the Messiah was rejected by Israel was because He was a man of sorrows and a dry root, not the glorious King they had expected. The same was true in Paul's day, the Jews were expecting someone else so their expectations overcame the message of truth. Isaiah predicted this would happen, at least in Christ's first coming. Paul wrote, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13-14). Indeed, the beautiful feet of Christ, the Word of God, works faith in our hearts today.

As we said earlier, faith must come before confession, yet faith comes from hearing the message of Christ. Did Israel not hear of Christ living in Old Testament times? Yes they did Paul says. How? Someone or something's voice and words went throughout all the earth, even to the ends of the world to give the word of Christ to Israel. Whose voice are we talking about here? The prophets? Not at all. This is a quote from Psalm 19 which states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Ps 19:1-4). Clearly the stars in the heavens gave Israel the message of Christ. How?

Before I explain too much, one must have a clear understanding of the difference between astronomy and astrology. Astrology is the pagan practice of telling future events and personal characteristics from the stars while astronomy is simply the scientific study of the stars. As Christians we reject astrology and accept astronomy. Though astrology has corrupted the original intent of the stars, their role in God's creation is clearly seen when one look far back into the roots of the constellations. It is commonly thought that the names of the constellations are modern and astronomers or astrologers named them, however, this is not true. As far back as our archaeological and historical records go, we see that the names and, for the most part, pictures of these constellations are unchanged. There seems to be nothing among the stars to suggest these pictures, so someone must have had a specific purpose to give these designs. This fact alone, suggests the stars are much more than astrology.

So why did God create the stars? The Bible states, "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.' And it was so. God made two great lights--the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars" (Gen 1:14-16). First, note that the stars were made separately from the "greater light" or the sun and, therefore, the sun is NOT a star as science tries to portray. We see this in the New Testament as well: "The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor" (1 Cor 15:41). Secondly, the stars, sun and moon are to serve as signs. Not astrological signs, as the pagans have done, but as signs of the times. We read in Isaiah: "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light" (Is 13:10). In Matthew the disciples asked, "What will be the *sign* of your coming and of the end of the age?" Part of Jesus' response was, "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the *sign* of the Son of

Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Mat 24:30-31). Thus the stars falling will be a sign of the end of this age and the beginning of the age to come (See also Eze 32:7; Joe 2:10; 3:15; Rev 6:13; 8:12).

Another example of stars as signs is seen at the birth of Christ. The Magi had seen a star in the east and went to Herod asking, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him. When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. . . .He asked them where the Christ was to be born. 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the Shepherd of My people Israel.' Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared” (Mat 2:2-7). We read in Peter: “[Jesus] was chosen before the creation of the world.” Knowing this, it makes perfect sense that God would have put this plan into His creation.

An interesting side-note should be made regarding the knowledge of the star of Bethlehem. How did the Magi know this was the star of the King? Part of God’s plan back around 586 BC, when Babylon captured Jerusalem, was to have this knowledge shared with others. Daniel was one of the first men to be exiled to Babylon, and because of the Lord’s deliverance was made head of the Magi. There is no doubt that Daniel shared his knowledge of the stars with these Magi, who in turn passed it down through the generations.

How could people over the entire world have the same constellations? Their roots must go back at least to the tower of Babel. I believe that Adam indeed knew of these constellations and their meanings. In fact, Josephus records that he did. What better way to preserve the Gospel message from the beginning of the world. We see many of the constellations recorded in Scripture. It even tells us God created them: "He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south" (Job 9:9; see also Job 38:31-32). Not only did God create the stars but He also knows them by name, "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Ps 147:4). Do you suppose the names God named them are the same names recorded throughout history? I believe, for the most part, they are. However, it didn't take long for Satan to get his ugly hands in this permanent message inscribed in the heavens. To make sure people would not see that message he got them to worship the stars rather than the star Maker, the creation rather than the Creator. The following shows why Satan would not want any Christian to know about this message. Over and over in the stars we see a serpent having his head crushed by Christ, the promised Savior and Seed. In Genesis we read, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Gen 3:15). Note the masculine gender of the One who would do the crushing. The word for "He" is *ipse* and is translated as so in the Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome (405 A.D.), as well as every ancient translation of Scripture we have. Why do I point this out? Because Rome had done a great disservice and wrongly translated this verse by making *ipse* into *ipsa*, a feminine gender, so that Genesis 3:15 read "She will crush your head." Rome tried to portray Mary as the one who destroys Satan, which is why so many Roman statues and paintings have had Mary standing upon the serpent. Thankfully, this does not seem to be taught any

more. There can be no denying the witness of the truth preserved in the stars. In the sky we see a male figure called Ophiuchus. He is seen standing upon the head of Scorpio, a scorpion who represents satan. In addition, the scorpion is stinging the heel of this man. A vivid picture of Genesis 3:15. We see Christ represented again in Aries as HE binds up Cetus the sea monster (satan). We see Christ as Orion, not only destroying satan with HIS club, but also standing upon Lepus, another representation of satan. Hercules (Christ) also has HIS foot raised to crush the head of Draco, the dragon (satan). And finally, the last of the constellations is Leo who stands upon the devil as represented by Hydra. One can not find a better picture of Genesis 3:15. There can be no denying that the theme of the stars in the heavens is that Christ would not only come to conquer death and the devil on the cross, but, He is coming again to destroy satan forever.

To give you a little more specific of an example, let's look at Ophiucus crushing the head of Scorpio. It can be no coincidence that the star name in Ophiucus' heel that is getting stung is named the bruised. Surely, Christ had His heel bruised by satan, yet He would crush satan's head.

Another example is Virgo the virgin. Again, one doesn't look at the stars and say, "I see a woman up there and she looks like a virgin." The star names give us the pictures. The brightest star within this constellation is in her hand and it is named the "branch." This is why they show a picture of a branch in her hand. However, it isn't the ordinary word for branch. The Hebrews called this star *Tsemech*, which is the name used for the coming Messiah. This word appears only four times in the Scriptures and all of them refer to Jesus as the branch. So why is there a virgin in the sky bringing the Messiah? Because their voice goes into all the earth, their words to the end of the world. As we read in the New Testament, "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been *proclaimed to every creature under heaven*, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant" (Col 1:23). There can be no excuse for anyone who will try and say they didn't hear the Word of Christ (see also Rom 1:20). The objection that the Jews or Gentiles had no opportunity to hear the message has been shot down by Paul in these verses. If you would like more information on this, the CIA presentation entitled "The Stars: God's Word in the Sky," is on DVD and will give you much more information than outlined here.

A word of warning. Do not get too carried away with this idea. The stars do not replace the Scriptures, nor do they save anyone, any more than the Bible saves someone. It is believing the message of Christ and calling upon His name that saves people. Some have taken the Gospel in the stars and have tried to read too much into them by predicting the time of the antichrist etc. It can become almost like Christian astrology, which is a contradiction in terms, and should in no way be practiced. The point I want to make is that Paul is saying here in Romans that nobody has an excuse to say they hadn't heard the message because even the stars have proclaimed His handiwork. There is no place one can go and not see that God exists and that He sent His son for us.

19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." 20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." 21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Paul must repeat himself to make sure people are not misunderstanding the importance of this truth. Israel was warned about their falling away and they were also told that others would join them in their covenant. None of what Paul is saying in Romans should be a surprise to the Jew. Even Moses, their great Rabbi said in Deuteronomy 32:21 that Israel would become envious by a people that were not organized as an individual nation. He even predicted that the Jews would be angry because of these people and their lack of understanding of God.

If Moses weren't enough, Isaiah also predicted in 65:1 that God would be found by those not even looking for Him. How could this happen. Because God made a promise, He was going to keep it and He would reveal Himself to the Gentile world by sending Paul and others to preach to them the truth of God's salvation.

Verse 21 sadly adds that as far as Israel was concerned, God was faithful to them, but they were faithful to God. God held out His hand for them to grab onto constantly, yet they, in their free will, rejected the offer and chose to live in disobedience. God even sent prophets like Isaiah to try and draw them back to Him, but they were obstinate and proud. Now, God offers that hand to all nations under heaven and each individual has the same opportunity to grab onto that hand, or to do as the Jews once did, and reject the offer. Anyone rejecting God's grace cannot blame God because His arms were outstretched on the altar that was in the shape of a cross for you.

This chapter closes with a clear distinction being made between the Jew and the Gentile. The next chapter will answer the obvious question of what will happen to the Jew. There we will see that the tables will soon turn and Israel will be restored while the time of the Gentiles comes to an end.

Romans 11

11:1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-how he appealed to God against Israel: 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? 4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

If God was holding out His hand to an obstinate people and Israel rejected God does that mean that God rejected them? Though many in the church today answer this with a resounding yes, the Scriptures answer with a "By no means!" How could God have rejected the Jews if the man whom God chose to witness to the Gentiles was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin? God did not reject his people "whom He foreknew." These are the words used back in 8:29. As we have been discussing in earlier chapters, Israel was God's elect for a special vocation that will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Further proof that God has not rejected the Jew comes from God's Word to Elijah when Elijah was fed up with his own people (1 Kings 19:10-18). In the days of Elijah the

Israelite kings had killed the prophets and torn down the altars used to worship the Lord. Elijah was the only prophet left and the Jews were trying to kill him now too. No doubt the Jews had become corrupt and had rejected God much like they have today. Though men can turn their backs on a people group, however, God is faithful and never turns His back on the ones He has made a covenant with. God's answer to Elijah, and to us today, is that He is in control. God had kept 7,000 Jews who have not bowed down to the false gods and likewise today, God, in His grace, has been preserving a righteous remnant. The 7,000 may be a symbolic number to show the full number needed or it could be a literal number. In either case, it was a small percentage of the people of Israel, yet the yeast would work through the entire batch of dough just like from the 12 disciples the truth of the Gospel has spread to the world.

God had given Israel the promised land to be the center of attention for the world so that they could be a blessing to the nations around them, however, the Jews weren't the model of God that they were supposed to be. This is the same reason Messianic Jews exist today, so that they can be a righteous remnant to bless the nations around them. God has always preserved this remnant even among times of wickedness. Abraham debated with God for the remnant in Sodom but Abraham and Lot were the remnant. If only 10 people (righteous remnant) were there God would have spared Sodom and the same is true today. From a tiny remnant God brought from the stump of Jesse, a shoot to bear fruit (Isa 10:33) for the preservation of the world. Around 615-610 BC Jeremiah and Josiah were good friends but after Josiah died all the kings of Israel were bad, yet because of the righteous remnant (people) God still spared them. Even among the Babylonian exiles God raised up men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Around 450 BC there was a 3rd wave of people returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah were some of this remnant who returned but in actuality, only about 10% of the people went home. The rest of the Jews were comfortable because they had been born in Babylon and it was all they knew. Israel was a foreign land to them. It is very similar to the people of Israel today. Even though they have permission to return to the land, very few are returning. Just think if all the Jews had returned, there would have been that many more people who would have been in the land when their Messiah came. Instead, Jesus had to go look for the "lost sheep of Israel." When the Greeks had Hellenized the Jews, there was a remnant that refused to go along with the culture and the Maccabean revolt took place. In the days of Jesus many Pharisees and Sadducees believed on Him (Act 15:5). In the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD there were a group of Messianic believers led by Simon (cousin of Jesus) who led them out to Pella and spared them from destruction by the Romans. In the 700's God raised up the Muslims to protect the Jewish remnant. In the 1400's God was still preserving the Jew when a Christian man from Cologne went to Spain from Italy in 1480. He hung out with the Jews and Muslims, but he got really close with Jewish Conversos. He was an explorer and wanted to find a way to India via the Atlantic Ocean. His name was Christopher Columbus. Interestingly, he dated everything in his journal from the date of the destruction of the Jewish Temple. The letters from his son seemed to have a code that looked like the Hebrew abbreviation for "with the help of God." He always had an interest in Jewish affairs in Spain and aboard his ships there were at least six identifiable Conversos. Many suggest that it is very likely that Columbus himself was a Jewish Converso. Even so, there is no doubt that God used Columbus to rescue a remnant of Jews by bringing them to America. Columbus

left his mission on the 9th of Av. When he heard about the expulsion order that was to be sure doom for the Jews, he waited until the following night and took some of the Conversos with him, perhaps to help them. Columbus left Spain on the 9th of Av to go to the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa. In 1492 he left the Canary Islands and in his journals he recorded that one night he heard a strange sound coming from one of the ships. Later the same sound came from the other two ships. The sound he recorded was the singing of the Kol Nidre, (means vows) the Hebrew prayer that begins the Day of Atonement and Yom Kippur. This prayer was developed in the middle ages so that Jews who made forced vows against their will were able to renounce them on Yom Kippur and could be made right with God. Another journal from one of the Conversos aboard the ship recorded that a man pulled a palm branch out of the water on the last day of Sukkot (Hoshanna Rabba) or Tabernacles which is the day when the Jews were to wave palm branches before the Lord. This was significant because they were within a few days of discovering America, which was very important for the survival of the Jews who had been kicked out of every other country. Columbus had taken a remnant with him. If it wasn't for America, Hitler would have wiped out the Jews.

These are just a few examples of how God has protected a remnant so that the Messianic Jews of today can exist to bless the nations as the covenant promise stated. The problem is if the remnant doesn't arise at critical times problems come about instead. This is what happened in Germany when the remnant did not arise.

Just as it is with the Gentiles who did nothing to deserve God's grace but were born into sin and depravity, the Jews also are chosen by grace and not by their works and lifestyle. God is being faithful to His covenant even among their unfaithfulness.

7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, 8 as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." 9 And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. 10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

Israel seemed to have followed the Lord more than any other nation, yet they never obtained the complete goal, yet the elect did obtain it. This is a reference back to chapter nine where we see why they did not obtain righteousness: "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom 9:31-32). Israel "seemed" to follow God but they were trusting in their own obedience, not the sacrifice for their failures. Because they looked to themselves, they failed to see their sins and thus failed to repent.

Israel was God's chosen nation to bring the truth of the Gospel and blessings to the nations. How can they not be the elect? As we have been saying, the elect are elected for a vocation and Israel failed to do their job so God had to do it for them. In Matthew we read, "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called My son.'" (Mat 2:15). This is in reference to Christ being taken to Egypt as a baby to be protected from Pharaoh. The interesting thing, however, is that this quote

doesn't seem to be talking about Jesus, but Israel, as we see in Hosea, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hos 11:1). The nation of Israel was foreshadowing the life of Christ, who would fulfill their mission for them. For example Israel was born of a miracle birth through the promised son, Isaac. Yet Jesus was a miracle birth through Mary. King David was from Bethlehem, King Jesus was also from Bethlehem. Both were brought out of Egypt by a promise. Pharaoh tried to destroy Israel and Herod tried to destroy Jesus. Moses rose as a savior of Israel, yet Jesus is a better Moses. Israel was baptized in the Red Sea (1 Cor 10), Jesus was then baptized in the Jordan. Israel spent 40 years wandering in the desert and Jesus went from His baptism into a 40 day trial and temptation. Israel went into the promised land being led by Joshua and Jesus (Hebrew name is the same as Joshua) came to the promised land to lead the people. Joshua was told to destroy the inhabitants of the land to avoid spiritual and physical contamination but they failed in this mission. Therefore, Jesus, the better Joshua casts out demons and cleans up the land. While Israel died under the old covenant they would rise under the new. Likewise, Yeshua, Jesus, died under the old covenant and rose under the new. Clearly the history of Yeshua replicates the history of Israel and Jesus completes what the Jews failed to do. Since Joshua was unsuccessful in cleansing the land the demons stayed in the area but Yeshua came and did three things to solve this problem:

- 1) Cast out demons that came from the Canaanite tribes that Joshua left.
- 2) Heals the sick that were there due to disobedience (Ex 15:26; Deut 7:15; Deut 28:60)
- 3) Teaches Israel in order to bring back truth and empower them by the Spirit to go to the nations and fulfill their purpose.

The problem is that Israel's restoration is not yet complete. Israel still doesn't believe and their job is not yet finished. Jesus is going to make sure that their job gets done and He is in the process of doing it right now as later verses will show us.

Israel, the ones chosen to fulfill a vocation for the Lord did not obtain what they were looking for, yet the few of the remnant, the elect of God, did find it. Who are these elect of God? All those of the minority who followed the Lord in fulfilling their call. Men like Daniel, Noah, David, Josiah and others. It was the faithful remnant among the nation of Israel along with a few Gentiles that joined them like Ruth or Rahab.

The others were hardened. Does this mean God had not called them? Not at all. Even they are fulfilling a purpose as we will see in later verses. However, here we see that because of their willful disobedience, God gave them a spirit of stupor. That is, though conscious of life, blinded to the truth of the reality around them. Seeing with their physical eyes, but being blind in their spiritual eyes. Hearing with their physical ears, yet hearing nothing in their spirit. Paul writes of this in the New Testament, "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:13-15). This state of blindness is occurring to this very day. Note as well that it was Israel that rejected God and the result was the God did the blinding. When we continually reject His offer of grace and mercy, He will withdraw His outstretched arms. As he said in Isaiah, "All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Rom 10:21). There will come a time that the hand will no longer be held out even for the church today.

Isaiah speaks of the blindness referred to here in verse eight: “The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); He has covered your heads (the seers). For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, ‘Read this, please,’ he will answer, ‘I can’t; it is sealed.’ Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, ‘Read this, please,’ he will answer, ‘I don’t know how to read.’ The Lord says: ‘These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish’” (Isa 29:10-14). There are many other cases in the Bible where we see it is God who does the blinding to those who have rejected Him: “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” (2 Thess 2:11), and “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’” (Mark 4:11-12).

In verse nine we see that David had even predicted the spiritual blindness of his enemies in Psalm 69:22-23. This Psalm is Messianic and refers to Jesus going back to the idea that Jesus would fulfill Israel’s history for them. The Psalm describes the abuse that the Messiah would receive from His own people. There can be no question of “why” the Jews have not recognized their Messiah YET. David said that their table would become a trap and a snare. I see this happening to many in America today. The blessings poured out upon us have caused us to forget our Creator. Sometimes we don’t know how to handle all our blessings and they become a snare rather than a help. Their source of sustenance and self-seeking pleasure became a stumbling block and a retribution rather than a cornerstone and a place of mercy. This is a common stumbling block to many as Ezekiel writes, “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before Me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen” (Ezek 16:49-50). Moses warned Israel of forgetting God among their full tables, “When the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you--a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant--then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deut 6:10-12). Hosea said, “‘If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor My name,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor Me’” (Mal 2:2).

Likewise, David said that their eyes would be darkened. This is not to mean literal blindness but a stupidity of the mind. Even today, what is so clearly outlined in their Torah Scriptures and even within their Talmudic writings about their Messiah is overlooked and misunderstood.

Not only are they spiritually blinded, but physically abused as well. Their backs were to be bent forever, that is that they would be placed in a slave state. The Hebrew implies a state of oppressiveness and burden. The Psalm from which this is taken implies

that this was the consequence of their treatment of the Messiah. As one studies the history of the Jew, until recent years they have always been mistreated and rejected. In many cases, they have been kicked out of entire countries with no country being willing to accept them. It seems that being chosen isn't always an easy thing; especially when one doesn't do what they have been chosen to do. Yet in all of these trials, God is still working, preserving a remnant and causing the Jew to be a blessing to the nations around them, even to this day. In fact, as of the 1990's, 20% of Nobel prizes have gone to Jews. However, these physical and material blessings pale in comparison to the spiritual blessings that many of the completed Messianic Jews have brought to the table for Christianity.

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

Since it is clear that Israel did indeed stumble and got caught in a snare, does that mean that they will never be released and recover? Once again, though the church today behaves as if this were so, God says emphatically, NO! This is all part of God's sovereign plan so that "all Israel" might be saved. All Israel includes the Jews and the Gentiles who will be grafted into the Jewish olive tree.

Verse 11 explains that it was the very rejection of God that allowed salvation to come to the Gentiles. As we read through the book of Acts we see that the Gospel was always preached first to the Jews, and only after they rejected it was it preached to the Gentiles. This was obeying God's command as we saw earlier in Romans "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom 1:16-17). Yet even in this, God's plan is to make Israel envious of the Gospel given to the Gentiles so that they would return to Him. It is, it was and it always will be about the covenant God gave to Abraham and his descendants. God has given the Gospel to the Gentiles, in part to save the Jew, yet He had the Jew reject the Gospel to save the Gentile so that all Israel would be saved. It was their transgression that has brought the Gentiles into the covenant of grace. Ironically, it was the Jews that spread the good news to the Gentiles, yet this is only part of the riches the Gentiles will receive because of the Jews.

Verse 12 continues to answer the repeated claim that the Jew, therefore, must be lost. If Israel's turning away meant the Gospel would be delivered to the Gentiles and spiritual riches would go out to the entire world, not just the promised land, will they not be rewarded for this? Yes and no. Individual Jews who have rejected the Gospel have no hope in Christ, yet God's faithfulness to His covenant has always kept a faithful remnant who will one day rise up, and the nation of Israel will repent and return to their Lord Jesus. This is the "fullness" that is referred to when today we call a Jew who believes in Christ, a "completed" Jew. God is clearly saying that when Israel is completed there will be even *greater riches* ahead for all. What riches can be greater than salvation? The quick answer is heaven. Right now salvation has come to all who believe, however, we still live in these earthly tents filled with the sinful flesh. Even those who have already died in the Lord, though they are with Christ in paradise, they have not yet received their full reward.

It isn't until the Lord returns the second time that the full riches of the Gospel will be dealt out and the Lord will not return until Israel repents and their fullness comes about. Jesus predicted this when He said to the Jews, "For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt 23:39). This truth will be made even more clear in verse 25 of this chapter. Doesn't it make you want to pray for the salvation of the Jewish people even more? It should, especially since God told us to, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps 122:6). It was no accident that God had the disciples always go to the Jew first. If *they* did it, why don't *we*? Ultimately it is because we have an anti-Semitic philosophy inherited from our church fathers, even within our churches today. Even Christians who recognize the Biblical festivals today are viewed as legalistic and Jewish, when the truth is it has nothing to do with any Jewish culture, but rather Biblical teaching. Allow me to take some time to explain by reviewing some church history. Though it is a little lengthy, it will give a better understanding of why the church thinks they way they do today.

EARLY MESSIANIC CHURCH IN 100 AD

We read of the Council of Jerusalem which was comprised of the Apostles and Elders in Acts 15. We can see from Scripture and history that they would make rulings and send letters out to the community. Sometimes the rulings were oral but most often written. This is exactly how the Jewish Sanhedrin operated as well.

In extra-Biblical writings James becomes a very popular and well known man. It is recorded that he becomes the leader of the zealots but is killed not long after. However, Simon (cousin of Yeshua) took over and led the Nazarenes (Messianic Jews) out of Jerusalem to Pella when the Romans came to attack Jerusalem. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this spared the remnant from being destroyed with the rest.

Be examining the council in Acts 15 we see that James would be like the *Nasi* or ruler of the group. As we look at the chapter we see that Paul and Barnabas were arguing, however, when they finished, James speaks up in verse 19 to make a final ruling. James was the brother of Jesus and a descendant of David, just like the *Nasi* of the Jewish Sanhedrin would have been. As we read Acts 15:12-20 closely we can see the leadership role James took: "The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages. 'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.'" From these verses we can get a little insight into the structure of the early church and how it bore similar organization to the Jewish synagogues, which would only be natural that it would. Historically we see that until 133 AD there were bishops that led in Jerusalem which further substantiates that there were individual leaders within the Messianic church.

In Acts 13:13-48 we read, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, [high concentration of Jews here] and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. . . Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen. . . When the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy. . . Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul. . . Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” WHY WERE THEY GLAD? First of all we see three groups of people being represented here: 1) Jews, 2) Gentile God-Fearers, and 3) Proselytes. The Gentiles were permitted in the synagogue but were not considered first class citizens and they didn’t have the same rights others did. They weren’t Proselytes who went through all the rigmarole to become accepted by the Jews. This is why in verse 48 it shows the Gentiles being glad because they became co-heirs, or first class citizens. It was this arrogance of the Jews that was causing a great division among the church.

The Jews were considered atheists by the Romans but they still allowed them to have a certain status within their borders because there were so many of them. When the Gentiles participated in the synagogue they had to pay the temple tax because they weren’t of the Jewish nation. This meant more money, however, when Paul preached and made them co-heirs they would no longer have to pay the tax. This, too, began to allow Gentiles to be freed from some of the Jewish community rules. In addition, increased persecution of the Jews by the Romans made the attachment to the Jewish community less attractive to the Gentile believers as well.

This all led to a widening gap between Jewish believers, unbelieving Jews and Gentile believers. It wasn’t long and the *Birkhat Haminim* prayer was developed (Curse against the Heretics). This prayer was added by the Rabbis in the early 90’s to remove anyone that didn’t follow their version of the Jewish faith, especially the Nazarenes who believed Jesus was the Messiah. As a result, Jewish believers were being kicked out of their communities (Possible that the book of Hebrews may have been written to these people to hang in there).

During this time of the 90’s AD the Gospel was spreading quickly, however, it was mostly Gentiles that were accepting the message for two reasons: 1) Most people were Gentiles, and 2) They were responding favorably as God foretold, whereas the Jews weren’t.

The growing Gentile church brought about a growing split between Jew and Gentile believers. This is seen in Acts when Paul goes to the synagogues.

EARLY CHURCH THINKING- JEWS VS GENTILES

This growing split is clearly seen in early writings from the church. Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch or Northern Syria today) wrote a letter to one of the churches in the area about 107 AD. He said, “If we conform to Judaism, then we have not received grace.” He then urged them not to obey the Sabbath by saying, “It is absurd to have Jesus Christ on the lips and at the same time to live like a Jew. No, Christianity didn’t believe in Judaism but Judaism believed in Christianity. And in its bosom was assembled everyone professing faith in God.” Because of these conflicts and the Jews removing

Jewish believers out of the community, by 107 AD the idea was coming out that you could not be a Jew and a Christian.

We also see in the Epistle of Barnabas, which is a pseudepigraphical writing and not to be included in the Bible, anti-Jewish thinking. This writing was recorded between 96-98 AD and was written for Jews who believed in the Messiah. It states, "The Jews lost their covenant forever when Moses destroyed the Tablets on Mount Sinai. Jesus is for the Gentiles who are the true recipients of God's covenant. Not the Jews. The keeping of the New Moons are abolished, as well as other Jewish law. There is only one Law, the Law of Jesus Christ." Again, we see that the covenant God gave Abraham and his descendants was being ignored because of the hatred towards Judaism. This was leaving the true Jewish believers between a hard place and a rock.

Even Justin Martyr (1st of early church fathers 130's -140's) wrote two major theological treatises called the 1st and 2nd apologies. He was writing among a world with three competing philosophies, Greek pagan philosophy, Jews, and Christianity. Therefore, what he tried to do was to build a theology stating what we should believe and why. It was very lengthy but had 4 main pivotal events in history he believed theology should be based on. These four events are still accepted and taught in most seminaries today as a basis of our faith. They included the following:

- 1) Creation: Gen 1-2
- 2) Fall: Man introduces his own will. Gen 3
- 3) Redemption in Christ: Restore human condition from the Fall. Matthew.
- 4) Consummation through Christ's return. Revelation

The problem is these four events eliminate most of the Bible and Israel. You cover the first three chapters of the Old Testament and then jump to the New Testament. This error also leads to replacement theology, that is that God has *replaced* Israel with the Gentiles. Again, WHERE IS THE COVENANT?

History records a letter that Martyr wrote to a Jew named Trypho. It is unclear if this really happened, but the story is that he was in Ephesus waiting to board a ship when some Jews came along that were fleeing from the Bar Kokba revolt. Martyr and Trypho got into a debate over the Messiah where Martyr describes three significant aspects of the rest of the Scripture outside of his earlier four points. He said that outside of the first three chapters of Genesis, the Bible is for the following: 1) prophecies pointing to Christ 2) Scriptures pointing to a universal moral code for every believer, and 3) the remainder was written to the Jews which is no longer useful. Again, WHERE IS THE COVENANT?

Martyr went on to say that the God of Israel is among the church rather than the Jews. He said that the Church is the climax of the purpose of creation and God's relationship with the physical Jews is ended and the spiritual relationship with the church had begun. He said, "God instituted circumcision so you and you only might suffer the infliction due those who crucified Christ. Since circumcision of the flesh is the mark you can be distinguished from other men." How messed up is this theology? The Bible says circumcision was a sign of the covenant so clearly Martyr is wrong here. Is this the attitude we are reading about here in Romans where Paul wished he could be cut off from Christ for the sake of his own brothers? Is this the attitude Paul takes when writing

salvation is “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile?” Is this what Romans means when it keeps telling us God is not done with the Jew?

In any case this type of early church father attitude begins the institution of Christianity, totally separating it from the Jewish World. From here things begin to spiral downward. *Ideas* were introduced, discussed and adopted that led to anti-Semitic *action and behavior*.

Another problem was that the early church was dealing with a series of heresies. One was Gnosticism, which said there was a material world and a spiritual one and that the spiritual world was more valuable and meaningful. This teaching began to invade Christian theology. Also, Marcion (200 AD) was a heretical bishop who believed there were two Gods. The Old Testament god and the New Testament god. He said the New Testament god was greater and dealt with the spiritual aspects while the Old Testament god dealt with the materialistic realm.

Two major church fathers responded to Marcion by attacking the idea of two gods and also the issue with the Jews. One man was Tertullian (200 AD) who said that the God of Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and there is no other. So far so good. However, he explained the differences in the old and new by saying, “The commandments of the Torah are degrading and unworthy of an enlightened people. They were given to the Jews to curb idolatry and greed, which was unique to them, not shared by the rest of the human race. Their trail of crimes culminated in the killing of Christ. Jews were always unworthy of election. Now they have lost it. God’s choice is now transferred to the Gentiles who are capable at living at a higher level than the Jews.” Isn’t it interesting that the Jews were the only monotheistic nation throughout history, yet he calls them unworthy. Isn’t it also interesting that it doesn’t depend upon man’s doing but God’s calling, so it really doesn’t matter what the Jewish deeds were? Isn’t it interesting that Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:18). Last I checked not everything is accomplished until the Lord returns and the earth is still here.

Another man to respond to Marcion was Irenaeus (200 AD). He reconciled the two testaments by saying God’s history with man was continuous from creation to the end. He said that God’s purpose hadn’t changed and that, “God chose the Jews in order to prepare them for Christ but they rejected and murdered him. Because the Jews rejected Jesus, God granted their inheritance to Gentiles alone. Jews who boast of being Israel are disinherited from the grace of God. Jews are no longer useful.” God granted salvation to the Gentiles alone? What about Paul and all the Jews who believe today? What about the covenant?

I hope that one can see that Judaism is based upon the teachings of the Rabbis but even Christianity has its faults when it is based upon the teachings of the church fathers. To say Christianity is based on the New Testament is to say Judaism is based on the Old Testament. Both are wrong! Judaism is based on the Talmud which filters the Old Testament through it. Christianity today is based on the institution of the church fathers with the New Testament filtered through it. We believe what we’ve been taught to believe. The only filter we should have is the Bible as a whole and we should let Scripture interpret the Scriptures.

Later, Origen (185-254 AD) came about. He was a good Christian man but with erroneous prophetic views that laid the theological foundation for evil men (like Hitler) later. He harmonized the Bible with Plato's philosophy and came up with the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible; especially in areas of prophecy. The result was that the church leaders didn't see Jews as a distinct people because, in their minds, the church had replaced them. According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* it states, "The church being God's true Israel according to the Spirit, the Jewish people no longer had any vocation or reason to exist." (vol 5, pg 507).

It was this type of thinking that caused Eusebius to write his *Ecclesiastical History* in 300 which covered the time period from the Apostles to 300 AD. This is the authoritative church history used in seminaries today. In this writing, he commented on Jewish communities living in Palestine, Syria, Cyprus and Babylon. He said that the Jews have no merit and were a threat to the church. He even stated the lie that at Purim Jews sacrificed Christians in rebellion against Jesus. During this time the Romans were very anti-Semitic and had all kinds of crazy stories as well. These stories and the false comment by Eusebius was later used to trump up charges against the Jews that was a springboard for later persecution.

In addition to all of this, canons were made saying, "if any clergyman shall enter into a synagogue of Jews or heretics [Nazarenes] to pray let him be deposed, if a laymen does this, let him be excommunicated." Once again, any believing Jew was caught in a very difficult place. How could they practice what God had asked them to practice in the Old Testament with a New Testament, Messianic understanding, without being lumped into unbiblical Judaism?

As a result, what developed in the 300's was a renunciation statement that new converts had to make if they were from a Jewish background. They had to: "Confess and denounce verbally the whole Hebrew people and forthwith declare with a whole heart and sincere faith that he desires to be received among the Christians. He must say the following: 'I renounce all customs rites, legalisms unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrew and all the other feasts of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers aspersions, purifications, sanctifications and propitiations fasts and new moons and sabbaths and superstitions and hymns and chants and observances and synagogues and food and drink of the Hebrews. In one word I renounce everything Jewish.'" Isn't the Sabbath one of the Ten Commandments? Doesn't God love the Jew and isn't His Word in the Old Testament still valid?

In addition, there were the Clementine Recognitions in the 300's that came from the Eastern Church. If a Jew became a Christian had to say: "I renounce the whole worship of the Hebrews, circumcision, all its legalisms, unleavened bread, Passover, sacrifices of lambs, feast of weeks, trumpets, jubilees, atonement, tabernacles and all other Hebrew feasts, sacrifices prayers, aspersions, purifications expiations fasts sabbath new moons foods and drinks and I absolutely renounce every custom and institution of the Jewish Laws" Again, where is this in the Bible?

Then came Emperor Constantine who "converted" to Christianity in 313 and made it the official State Religion. -To rid Christianity of anything Jewish he did the following:

- 1) Changed the days of the week and months by naming them after pagan gods.

- 2) Changed the Sabbath to “Sun” day for Mithras worship as even stated on the coins he minted.
- 3) Forbid Jews to keep the Lord’s festivals and replaced them with Easter and Christmas, which were formally pagan holidays.

Once Rome became Christian, the only people who weren’t were the Jews. This again causes additional problems for the Jew.

In 325 AD the Council of Nicea met. The focus was Arianism which said Yeshua was not Divine. However, in addition to addressing this heresy, they decided Easter would no longer be connected with Passover and said, “For it is unbecoming beyond measure that on this holiest of festivals we should follow the customs of the Jews. Henceforth let us have nothing in common with this odious people.” Keep in mind Passover wasn’t a Jewish thing, it was commanded by God as an everlasting ordinance that still has symbolism for Christ’s second coming.

The father of the Eastern Orthodox Church was John Chrysostom. He was known as the bishop with a golden tongue. He grew up in Constantinople which was the most powerful church of this time because it was center of the Roman empire. Chrysostom wrote a number of sermons against the Jews and advocated Jewish persecution by saying, “The Jews are the most worthless of all men they are wretches, greedy, rapacious. They are perfidious murders of Christ, they worship the devil their religion is a sickness. The Jews are the odious murderers of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible. No indulgence or pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance and the Jews must live in servitude forever God always hated the Jews. It is incumbent upon all Christians to hate the Jews.” Does this sound Biblical to you? Even though we haven’t gotten to these verses yet, I think it is important to look at them in advance here to see the heresy of these early teachings of the church fathers:

Rom 11:17-27 states, “And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, *do not boast against the branches*. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore *consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. . . For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”*

Rom 9:4-5 “the people of Israel. Theirs *is the adoption as sons; theirs* the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. *Theirs* are the patriarchs, and from *them* is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”

Rom 3:1-4 “What *advantage, then, is there in being a Jew*, or what value is there in circumcision? *Much in every way!* First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith? *Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all!*”

Chrysostom was successful in his propaganda for Jewish persecution. Christian masses began to attack synagogues for the first time. Jews were tortured, persecuted and killed while their buildings were burned down.

One of Chrysostom's contemporaries in the west was Saint Ambrose from Milan, Italy. There was a synagogue that was destroyed under a Christian emperor of Rome. A Pagan emperor named Theodosius took over and demanded that the synagogue be rebuilt. Ambrose responded to this by writing a letter saying: “I hereby declare that it was I who set fire to the synagogue. Indeed, I gave the orders for it to be done so that there should no longer be any place where Christ is denied.”

St Gregory of Nyssa, also in the west, wrote about the Jews: “Assassins of the prophets, companions of the devil, a race of vipers, a Sanhedrin of demons, enemies of all that is beautiful, in their lude grossness.”

From this history we can see how in such a short time the tables had turned. Now it was the Gentile Christians with the upper hand and they hated the Jews more than the other pagan rituals going on around them.

Augustine came about from 410-420 AD. He took a slightly different perspective that still wasn't good, but it wasn't crazy either. He was a Contemporary of St. Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin and whom also was extremely anti-Semitic. Augustine thought that the Jews needed to be left alone as an example of what God does to those who reject Jesus. This became the prevailing view for the next 500-600 years. Although Jewish rights were already being taken away and they were excluded from politics etc., they were at least physically safe for a while.

Emperor Justinian (527-565) issued a permanent Christian State Policy which said, “They [Jews] shall enjoy no honors. Their status shall reflect the baseness which in their souls they have elected and desired.” There were Jewish believers at this time but no writings have survived intact. Jews continued to be labeled and denied and no reconsideration of this perspective occurred for a 1000 years.

From looking at our history I would hope that one can see that WE need to pray. WE need to repent of this ungodly heritage that prevents the kingdom from being fully established. This has been a stronghold that needs to be brought down on order for the fullness of the Jew and their recognizing Jesus as the Messiah to take place.

Years later there was a young German lad named Martin Luther who at first wanted to be lawyer. However, he had an encounter with God and went to the monastery instead. In 1517, Luther posted the 95 Theses or condemnations of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg Germany. With this he did well in challenging the churches primacy, faith by works, the priesthood being only for priests etc. Luther was very popular and the people

rose up to protect him. In his early stages he was pro-Jewish and even formed a mission agency to reach the Jews. He wrote a tract in 1523 called, "*Jesus was a Jew by birth.*" where he challenged the church to recognize who Jesus was. Luther said in this tract, "For are fools the Popes, the bishops, the sophists and the monks. These course donkey heads have hitherto treated the Jews in such a way that a good Christian could welter into a Jew. And if I were a Jew and saw such stupid rascals as these leading the Christian faith and giving instruction in it, I would sooner be turned into a swine than a Christian." I applaud Luther for this tract and it seems that this message should be given today as well. If only Luther had stood firm on this as well. However, in his later years he changed his tune.

Because the Gospel Luther preached wasn't being accepted by the Jews any more than the Catholic Gospel was, Luther got frustrated and later wrote a tract in 1543, a few years before he died. The tract was called, "*On the Jews and their Lies*" in which he wrote, "What should we Christians do with that rejected and accursed people the Jews whom we cannot suffer, who are among us. And we know so many of their lies, abusings and curses. I shall offer my faithful suggestion. First, that we burn their synagogues with fire and what cannot be burned will be buried with earth so that no man will ever more be able to see any stone or remnant of it. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom. Secondly, it is necessary to uproot and destroy their houses in the same way. Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings. . . Be taken away from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jew. Since there we find they do the same as in their synagogues or house. . . in order that they may know that they are not lords in our land as they claim but in exile and captivity. Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them, and put aside for safe keeping. . . Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade or a spindle into the hand of young strong Jews and Jewesses. . . Let us therefore use the simple wisdom of other peoples like those of France, Spain and Bohemia and expel them from the land forever. . . "

Luther did many great things for the church, yet he, like us today, was only a product of the culture he grew up in and was a fallible man. When will the church learn that we must rid ourselves of culture and fill ourselves with Christ and His Word? We need to ask ourselves why we believe the things we do and why we practice the things we do. If it isn't Biblical, but merely tradition or culture, we are in danger of being just like the Pharisees who placed their traditions above the Word. Jesus asked them, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matt 15:3). I ask you, why?

Luther's tract and philosophy was later used by Adolf Hitler. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* sums it up correctly speaking about this tract, "Short of the Auschwitz oven and extermination, the whole Nazi Holocaust is pre-outlined here." Is it any wonder that Adolf Hitler cited Martin Luther in *Mein Kampf* as one of the great heroes of the German people. Also the infamous Nazi war criminal Julius Streicher quoted Luther in his defense at the Nuremburg trials.

Barry R. Leventhal, Theological Perspectives of the Holocaust (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982, p.4.

Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews (New York: Harper Colophon books, 1961), pp.

1-4.

Paul will state in later a chapter, “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Rom 15:27). Do you have this attitude today?

It seems that the attitude is that the Jews need to convert to the Christian faith, yet in reality what we see in these verses and the following ones, is that the Gentiles were to convert to the Biblical faith of the Jews. This is not to say that Christians need to practice the Jewish traditions, but it does mean that it was the Christian grafted into the Jewish Olive root, not the root that was grafted into the wild olive branches as the following verses will describe. Every apostle was a Jew and none of them gave up their Jewish heritage to follow their Messiah.

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Pointing out that the Gentiles are to perk up and listen, Paul tells them that he was chosen to be an apostle or herald of the Gospel for the Gentile by Jesus Christ Himself (Gal 1:16; Eph 3:8; Gal 2:7). This is not to say that others didn't preach to the Gentiles because they did. It simply shows that God specifically called him to go to the Gentile, yet even with his special call, He always went to the Jew first, then to the Gentile (Acts 13:46). He makes no apologies for this and admits he considers it to be very important and takes his mission very seriously. But why?

Verse 14 shows that Paul realized that by preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, there was hope in making the Jews jealous so that they would repent and look into this Gospel for salvation.

If God's temporary rejection of the Jew meant God's temporary acceptance and open door for the Gentile world, God's later acceptance of the Jew is going to bring about even greater riches of life from the dead. I don't believe this is just spiritual symbolism being referred to here. Paul is saying that when the Jews return to Christ, there will be a literal resurrection from the dead as the Scriptures promise. Paul will soon tell us, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). Ezekiel talks of the dry bones returning to life. The book of Hosea reflects this same truth whereas the bride was unfaithful but was taken back by her husband later. This is why God reconciles sinners: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-20). Until the Jew repent, there will be no final resurrection so “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

If we read Hebrews chapter four we see that there is a Sabbath rest that remains for God's people. Here we see that the Sabbath day (7th day) is still to come and that it will be a Day of rest. Perhaps that is also why we read in Peter, “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and

destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord *a day is like a thousand years*, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise” (2 Pet 3:7-9). We must be careful not to extend this thought into theorizing the six days of creation occurred over long periods of time. They were literal, 24 hour days! However, even Martin Luther noted that each day of creation seemed to roughly correspond to a thousand years of history. For example, the first day of creation was separating light from dark. The first thousand years were dominated by Adam and Eve, who were known for causing the separation of good and evil. The second day of creation was separating water from water and creating the firmament above. The second thousand years of time after creation were dominated by Noah who is well known for living through the Flood and the first rainfall (Gen 2:5). The third day of creation was making dry ground and vegetation. The third thousand years was dominated by Abraham who became a great nation to fill the earth. The fourth day of creation consisted of the sun, moon and stars while the fourth thousand years was dominated by Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. We have seen in chapter 12, and in Joseph’s dream in Genesis, how the stars, sun and moon have represented the twelve tribes. Then, day five of creation created fish and birds and the fifth thousand years was dominated by the New Testament Church and Christ who fed the five thousand with a few fish and the Spirit of God landed on Him in the form of a dove. Both the fish and the bird have been New Testament symbols of faith. The sixth day of creation involved the creation of man, while the sixth thousand years of time have been dominated by man growing in knowledge and spreading the Gospel message throughout the world. The seventh day of creation was rest, as the seventh thousand years may be our “Sabbath rest for all of God’s people” as we saw in Hebrews. I realize that there is a fair amount of allegorizing with this, but not too much of a stretch for Luther to identify with. Scripture is filled with this type of allegory, much of which is even explained (see Galatians 4).

Let’s take this thought one step further. If each of the six, 24 hour days of creation foreshadowed each of the six thousand years of time on earth before the millenium, there should be other references to this. Consider the following: Hosea states, “For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. Then ***I will go back to My place until*** they admit their guilt. And they will seek My face; in their misery they will earnestly seek Me. Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. **After two days** He will revive us; **on the third day** He will restore us, that we **may live in His presence**” (Hosea 5:14-6:2). First of all, note that the Jews had been abandoned by Christ when He went back to His place. Christ’s place can only be understood as heaven here. He would remain there only UNTIL they admit their guilt and recognize Him as the Messiah. Just as Jesus said in Matthew, “For I tell you, you will not see me again *until* you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Mat 23:39). Once they do so, they will repent and return to the LORD. When will this take place? According to the Hosea text, AFTER two days! We are nearing two thousand years since Christ *ascended* into heaven. Therefore, we could perhaps expect a massive turning to Christ from the Jewish people. Then, ON the third day, or the seventh thousandth year after creation (millenium), God would restore them so that they can live with Him in His

presence. How can we live in Christ's presence unless this is the "Sabbath rest" for God's people that Hebrews spoke of?

The Hosea passage fits nothing that happened in Old Testament history and, therefore, must be a future prophecy, upon which we are about to see fulfilled. There is much evidence showing the Jewish people will turn back to Christ: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part **until** the full number of the **Gentiles** has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from **Jacob**. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.' As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and **His call are irrevocable**. Just as you who were **at one time** disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that **they too may now receive mercy** as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all" (Rom 11:25-32). Note that the Jews have only experienced a temporary hardening until the Gentiles have had their fill. Jacob is a term used for Jews and, therefore, cannot include Gentiles under spiritual Israel or ingrafted branches (Rom 11:11). Besides, the Jews and Gentiles are intentionally split up in these verses. When we read Romans 11 and 12 carefully, there is no question that the Jews will turn to Christ during the end times. Hosea must be talking about the end times. . . two thousand years after Christ "went to His place" in heaven. I pray that God will open our eyes to see this Gospel opportunity because the Lord can not and will not return until the Jews repent. When they do, it will mean life from the dead. Praise God!

Finally, verse 16 reflects the idea that if just a part of the dough which is offered in the firstfruit offering to God was consecrated and holy to the Lord, then all of it was to be considered holy. The Jews are the firstfruits because of the covenant God made with them. Therefore, anyone added to that lump will likewise benefit from the yeast. In other words, the Gentiles are also holy. However, it was the Jew who was first set aside to be the firstfruit. It was the Jew who was chosen from all other nations to be God's people under His covenant.

Likewise, if the root of a tree was holy, the branches would be holy because the branch receives its life from the root. I believe the root is the covenant promise of Christ who makes both Jew and Greek holy if grafted into that root. In other words, the remnant of Israel, which receives its life from God, and is sustained by Him, is considered holy because of God's covenant to them. They are not holy because of the fruit they produce or even the lack of the fruit produced. They are holy because they are connected to the life-giving Root of God their father, through Jesus Christ. Remember, "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ" (Rom 9:4-5). "It does not therefore depend upon man's effort or desires, but on God's mercy" (Rom 9:16).

17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, 18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this:

You do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Continuing with the theme of the root making the branches holy, Paul gives us an illustration of a tree with two types of branches; natural and wild. Before we begin, let us define the symbolism here. The wild branches are the Gentiles, the natural branches are the Jews and the root is the covenant of the promised Messiah. All together it makes an Olive tree that represents the church. One body with many members one root with many branches (Jews and Gentiles) as Paul states in the next chapter, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:5). Throughout the Old Testament the Jewish believers were called the olive tree. David said, "But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever" (Ps 52:8). Jeremiah prophetically spoke of the rebellious portion of Israel, "The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm He will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken" (Jer 11:16).

Some, not all, of the Jewish branches were broken off in order that some wild olive shoots (Gentiles) could be grafted into the same tree. This allowed them to share (not own) in the life giving sap of the root, or the covenant promise. As we read in Galatians, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham [the covenant] might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal 3:14). Luke wrote of Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save *what was lost* [could this Gentile Zacchaeus have been from one of the lost tribes of Ephraim?]" (Luke 19:9-10).

Verse 18 warns the wild Gentiles not to think too highly of themselves and boast over those Jews who have been rejected for a short time. If any Christian today wants to place themselves above the Jewish people and say that they have replaced the Jew they may want to consider the fact that they are in this precarious position and are receiving nourishment not by their own will or actions, but by God's grace. If they think they were "good enough" to earn this right, they might as well say they control the root, which is obviously not true.

Verses 19-20 echo the words of the church today. They say, "Jews were kicked out of the covenant so the church could replace them." Not at all! Rather, branches were removed *for a time* so that you could *join* them. There is no doubt that individual Jews (not all) have been broken off but, it is only because of unbelief. Meanwhile many (not all) of the Gentiles are standing because of faith. But where does belief and faith come from? The life-giving sap of the Holy Spirit. Without the father drawing men to him, they would never be able to believe to begin with. Therefore, don't be boastful and arrogant about your position in the kingdom of God, rather be afraid and respect the Giver of life.

Verse 21 shows why one better have a healthy fear of God. If God cut off many of the Jews because of their pride and arrogance in being the "people of God" and "sons of

Abraham” (John 8:33, Matt 3:9), then He will certainly cut out any Gentiles that take upon the same attitude of “We are the church,” or “we deserve it because we are now chosen.” We don’t deserve anything but death and eternal damnation. It is by God’s grace that you have been saved. Remember that and humbly give thanks for it. The author of Hebrews warns, “Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Heb 4:1-2).

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

To keep the Gentiles from being boastful, Paul warns them to think about God’s kindness and His sternness. God has been very kind to open up His covenant to the Gentile, yet it is not a guarantee that the invitation will always be there. In fact the Scriptures say there is a time coming when the doors will be closed: “Israel has experienced a hardening in part *until* the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25).

Verse 23 is a good reminder that though the Jew, in general, has rejected the Gospel, God can and will open their eyes someday soon. When this happens, God will graft them in again because He is willing and able.

Verse 24 shows the precarious position of the Gentile. They were wild shoots that are unnatural and do not belong in a cultivated tree. Yet because of God’s will, it was done. However, it would seem much more natural and plausible that the natural branches would be put back into their original tree. Clearly, this indicates that God’s plan to do so should not seem strange to the Gentiles. Even though God has been stern with them, He will also exercise His kindness. Gentiles are fully aware of this kindness through experience. Having known God’s love, it should not be surprising that God will remove His wrath and give mercy as He has done for the Gentile. Rom 11:22

From all of this discussion one thing is very clear, Christians of any background cannot earn the favor of God because of their faith and good deeds; however, their obedience is an extremely important condition on which God’s favor is to continue in their life. We read, “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2). We are also warned to, “Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand [church] from its place” (Rev 2:5).

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is

written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Paul doesn't want anyone to be ignorant of this mystery. So what is the mystery? That the Gentiles have come into the covenant because of the Jewish rejection of God. This is illustrated in many other verses:

- "Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past" (Rom 16:25-26).
- "God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of *this mystery, which is Christ in you*, the hope of glory" (Col 1:25-27).
- "And He made known to us the *mystery* of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head*, even Christ" (Eph 1:9-10).
- "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the *mystery made known to me by revelation*, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the *mystery of Christ*, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has *now been revealed* by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This *mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs* together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:2-6).

Israel has a hardening that is only temporary for the goal of accomplishing a mystery that was discussed in the law and the prophets but was simply not understood. However, once the full number of Gentiles comes into the kingdom of heaven, God is going to make His face shine upon the Jew once more. The full number of Gentiles doesn't mean every individual, rather the full number who will believe and will accept God's calling.

Likewise, verse 26 does not mean every individual Jew will believe, but rather all who would believe according to the foreknowledge of God. The nation of Israel as a whole will come to the saving knowledge of Christ. Others interpret this to be that every individual Jew who is alive in the end times when God's favor is given again will believe. Though this could be true, why, if God's favor is on the Gentiles today, does not every individual Gentile accept it? One final possibility of who "all" is can be found in our earlier discussions. If you recall at the beginning of this commentary we discussed who Israel was. The 12 tribes had been divided into two groups, one being called Israel, (northern kingdom or Ephraim) and Judah (southern kingdom or Judah). Some believe this "all Israel" is to be applied to the lost ten tribes of Ephraim who became known as Gentiles (Gen 48:19). These lost tribes are to combine with Judah to make all tribes one again (Ezek 37:19, Jer 3:18, Micah 5:3). Thus, the plan of God in bringing Gentiles into

the church was to bring all 12 tribes together again. This may very well be the case since Jesus said that He came only for the “lost sheep of Israel.” However, this does not mean that all Gentile believers are from one of these lost tribes. Keep in mind that Ruth and Rahab were not from any of these tribes. There are Gentiles who are full Gentiles that are able to join the house of Israel just as they had in the Old Testament. Isaiah may speak of this when he writes “The LORD will have compassion on *Jacob*; once again he will choose *Israel* and will settle them in their own land. *Aliens will join them* and unite with the house of *Jacob*” (Isa 14:1). In any case, all of Israel will be saved as God has promised.

Verse 26 also says that God will turn Godlessness away from Jacob. The Hebrew says, “to those forsaking ungodliness in Jacob.” In other words, God is going to have the Jews repent. God is not going to simply graft them into the Olive tree without the proper conversion process taking place within them. They will first repent because of God’s opening their eyes to their sins. Jeremiah speaks of this day when he writes, “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will *put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For *I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*’” (Jer 31:33-34).

We must ask, that if the church has replaced Israel, as so many churches preach today, why wouldn’t we say that the church is in a current state of rejection? How can God call Israel back if Israel is the church? This makes no sense at all and is precisely why one cannot say the church is Israel, rather the church has been welcomed into Israel’s covenant. Many commentaries suggest that what these verses suggest is that in the end times the Jews will repent and take hold of the Christian faith. This will never happen. They will repent and take hold of Jesus, but they will never take hold of what the church practices today because most of the church rejects the Jewishness of the Scriptures and have embrace worldly philosophies not even found in the Scriptures. Remember, we joined their tree, they aren’t joining ours. When you adopt a Chinese child in America, you don’t become Chinese, the child becomes American. Likewise, the prophecies suggest the church will become more “Jewish” in nature when the Jews take hold of Jesus. Zechariah writes, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you””’ (Zech 8:23). Jeremiah said, “O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, *the Gentiles* shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit” (Jer 16:19). This is not to say the Gentiles will practice Judaism, but rather the Gentile church will recognize the Jewishness of the Scriptures as a whole, and I believe, will practice many of the Biblical festivals. I know that sounds almost like false doctrine, however, it isn’t me saying it, but the Bible. Go read Zechariah 14 where it talks about the Lord’s second coming and how, “It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech 14:16).

Verse 27 tells us that God's covenant given to the Jew is bound up in the sacrifice made on Zion. However, salvation was only part of the covenant. God's promise to lead them to this salvation and to make sure the Word of God was preserved within the Jewish nation was another. It was this preservation and "entrusting them with the Word" that will allow them to see the sacrifice. Isaiah wrote, "'As for Me, this is My covenant with them,' says the LORD. 'My Spirit, who is on you, and My words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,' says the LORD" (Isa 59:21). God had also promised as part of His covenant to keep His love upon the Jew as a special people: Yet the LORD set His affection on your forefathers and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer" (Deut 10:14-16).

Another important point is that the deliverer will come from Zion. This is a hill among Jerusalem and because of this the city itself is often called Zion. It is no accident that this is where the Messiah was crucified and rose from the dead. Likewise, since we are speaking of end time events in these verses, the Lord will certainly return to Zion. However, the meaning here isn't to say the Christ comes again to die for the Jew. Christ can only die once and there is no need for Him to die again anyway: "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). The point being made is that the deliverance has already come to Zion, the blindness to this deliverance, however, has not yet been taken away. The Jew simply missed the Messiah because of their false expectations. Allow me some space to explain.

There are over 100 parallels between Joseph and Jesus. The following are just a few of them:

- 1) Both were betrayed by Jewish Brothers into Gentile Hands.
- 2) Both were betrayed by Yehuda or Judas for 20 pieces of Silver.
- 3) Both were taken to a place of condemnation to exaltation in one day.
- 4) Condemned between two criminals, one who died and one who lived.
- 5) Upon exaltation every knee bowed.
- 6) All power/dominion was given to Joseph by Pharaoh and to Jesus by God.
- 7) Upon exaltation Joseph took a Gentile Bride.
- 8) Joseph was not recognized by his own brothers the first time.
- 9) Joseph was recognized by his own brothers the second time. They wept over him. Jesus will be seen by the Jew on Christ's second coming and will weep over Him.
- 10) Joseph was falsely accused at an unfair trial.
- 11) Joseph's cloak was taken to prove he was no longer in the pit.
- 12) Joseph was despised without cause for a prophetic gift.
- 13) Both were 30 years old when their ministry began.
- 14) Both were taken to Egypt.
- 15) Both were the first born.
- 16) Both were tempted.
- 17) Both were shepherds (John 10:11).
- 18) Both brought evil reports to their father (John 7:7).
- 19) Both foretold their futures (Matt 26:64).

- 20) Both were envied by their brothers (John 12:18-19).
- 21) Both were sent forth by their fathers (1 John 4:10).
- 22) Both were seeking the welfare of their brothers (John 1:11).
- 23) Both of their words were not believed.
- 24) Joseph was cast into a pit and Jesus into Hell.
- 25) Both were sold for silver coins.
- 26) Both pleased their master.
- 27) Both were tempted, yet passed the test.
- 28) Both were innocent, yet suffered greatly.
- 29) Both predicted a blessing (cupbearer/believers) a curse to another (baker/lost).
- 30) Joseph was given a wife and Jesus the Church bride.
- 31) Both dispensed food to the people.
- 32) Both punished and tested the unbelieving brothers.
- 33) Brothers will confess their guilt at the second coming in both cases.
- 34) Joseph's brothers go and proclaim his glory as do followers of Christ.
- 35) Both settle their brothers in a land of their own
- 36) Both brothers try to pay for the mercy given them.
- 37) Both brothers maintain a legalistic spirit.
- 38) Both invite their brothers to come near to them.
- 39) Both give brothers a word of admonition before leaving.
- 40) Both let brothers know deliverance is by grace.

The reason this is important is because Judaism understood the Messiah would come in the character of Joseph (son of Joseph) and that He would be typified by him. However, the Messiah was also to be typified as the Son of David. The Jews understood both Joseph and David as Messianic figures, therefore, the Messiah's life should replay experiences of both men. The problem was they wanted to focus on the reigning King and, therefore, were looking for the son of David, not the son of Joseph. In reality, however, there would be one Messiah, but two comings. Unfortunately, the Jews missed this.

1st Coming – Jesus is Son of Joseph coming on donkey (Is 53, Zech 9:9 and Ps 22)

2nd Coming – Jesus is Son of David coming as conqueror and King (Zech 12-14)

To understand this let us go and look at the events of Palm Sunday. Normally, on this great festival the Jews would sing from a festive liturgy called *Maqzor* (Ps 113-118 and is called the *Hallel Rabbah* or Great praise).

This was always sung at Passover with the climax being Ps 118:22-29 being quoted out loud as follows:

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is God, and He has made His

light shine upon us. *With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession* up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks; You are my God, and I will exalt You. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever” (Ps 118:22-29).

We see this song being sung in Matthew 21:9 where the people are shouting, “Hosanna to the *Son of David*.” In verse 42 Jesus calls Himself the stone which is rejected speaking from the quoted text (Ps 118:22). The Jews shouted, *Baruch Ha Ba B’shem Adonai. Barachnu Hem Mi Beit Adonai. Hodu L’Adonai Ki Tov. Ki La Olam Chasdo. Hoshanna, Hoshanna L’ Ben David*. (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD) (Ps 118:26).

Just a few days later JESUS said, “For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt 23:39). This is strange because it seems as if Jesus was saying Palm Sunday never happened.

We also see that during His triumphal entry in Matthew it states, “A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, *while others cut branches from the trees* [they were not told to do so for Passover as described in Lev 23] and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the *Son of David!*’ ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest’” (Matt 21:8-9)!

The reason this is significant is because there were two festivals where the Jews were to sing Ps 118, Passover and Tabernacles. These festivals represent ONE Messiah but TWO separate comings. The Passover was to represent Christ’s first coming as the suffering Son of Joseph while Tabernacles was to represent His second coming as the Son of David. In

Leviticus 23:4-8 we see the rules for Passover: “These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, . . . to proclaim at their appointed times: The LORD’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.” Notice nothing is said of Palm branches.

However, when we see in Leviticus 23:39-41 about the Feast of Tabernacles it states, “So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days . . . On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, *and palm fronds*, leafy branches and poplars, and *rejoice before* the LORD your God for seven days.” It was at this feast that palm branches were to be used, not at Passover. Why were the Jews waving palm branches for the Passover celebration? They were celebrating Passover with a Tabernacles mentality.

In Daniel 7:21-22 we read “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.” Note here that the saints possess the kingdom AFTER Christ returns, not BEFORE. In other words, the Jews should have been embracing the suffering servant, the son of Joseph and the kingdom to come, not the kingdom now theology that they had.

The Jews were expecting the Son of David to take His throne and free the Jews from the Roman oppression. They thought they understood God's plan and His ways, but they were wrong.

Much like today, people don't want a kingdom come, but a kingdom now, so they reject the Messiah.

During Passover it was customary to listen to famous rabbis debate on traditions of Passover. The people wanted a display of miracles as they had always heard about back in Egypt. This is the mindset they had and, therefore, this is what they were expecting from the Christ. Jesus, however refused to put on a show of Kingdom now. What did He do instead? Matthew 21 shows that He performed a search of leaven by clearing the Temple of "yeast" which was a practice done in every household during the Festival of Passover. This yeast was a representation of sin and was showing that God was looking for repentance which is why John the Baptist was sent.

Only AFTER the leaven was removed from the Temple did Jesus heal the lame and blind (v. 14). Miracles were not emphasized over holiness and repentance. The result was that the Jews missed Jesus and followed a false Messiah with a Kingdom now theology in 120 AD named Simon Bar Kochba who led Jews to a national holocaust worse than the 70 AD destruction of the Temple.

Jesus came the first time as the suffering Son of Joseph. We now wait for His return as the reigning Son of David. The Jews missed this, but there is a day coming when they will realize their mistake when God opens their eyes.

What we have been describing here with the comparisons of Jesus and Joseph is the Midrash, or the Jewish way to interpret the Bible. As the church became more Gentile it lost sight of its Jewish origins. People with a different world view (more Greek) redefined Biblical truth on Greek philosophies.

Midrashic hermeneutics has the New Testament using and explaining the Old Testament. It never uses typology or allegory as a basis for doctrine, but only as an illustration of it. In Western hermeneutics used in the churches today, we see end times prophecy merely in terms of predictions and fulfillments. Jews see it as patterns being recapitulated. One example was seen in comparing Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1 as described in the section on Romans 11:7. The quotation of Matthew 2:15 shows that the disciples interpreted prophecy with a Midrashic understanding. Other examples are in Galatians 4 with Hagar and Sarah. Also, in 1 Corinthians 10 we see the Exodus as a type of our departure from spiritual Egypt and having Pharaoh, as a type of antichrist, being destroyed. The Song of Miriam sung after the Red Sea crossing and again after deliverance in Revelation 15. The Bones of Joseph being brought into the Promised Land parallel the dead in Christ rising first. Likewise in Matthew we see wicked Herod is judged as was Pharaoh and the Messiah comes out of Egypt where He fled in times of trouble just as Israel had done. Jesus is pictured as the embodiment of Israel. Abraham departed from Egypt leaving it behind and later his descendants go back there. They later came out in the Exodus. Jesus goes to Egypt and later comes out with Joseph and Mary. Now we are told to come out of Egypt.

The Epistles are simply inspired commentary on other Scriptures as seen in Paul's Midrash on Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4. Likewise, Paul addresses the Mosaic Law reactively in Galatians to refute error, but proactively in Romans to illuminate truth.

I guess the point of all this is to show that when we have preconceived notions based on doctrines that come out of isolated verses and hermeneutics that are not Scriptural, we can be misled. However, when we interpret the Bible properly, we see God's plan more clearly and it keeps us from making the same mistakes. There is one Messiah and two comings, one Gospel for two distinct peoples, one plan of salvation for two different eras, one plan of disobedience in order that there may be salvation for all (v. 32).

One other example of how false hermeneutics leads to false interpretations can be seen in Corinthians where we read, "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them" (1 Cor 15:29). Are we suppose to baptize the dead? Of course not, which is why most commentaries simply say that Paul must have been referring to a pagan custom. Paul wouldn't do that to support the truth of the resurrection!

The answer is found in the Old Testament where we read, "This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence" (Num 19:2-3). As you read on in this chapter you will see that anyone who had been in contact with a dead body was unclean and couldn't enter the temple/Tabernacle without going through this ritual *mikvah* (baptism). Symbolically, this shows that we can't enter heaven until our flesh is left behind.

The next thing that happened was the priest mixed the ashes of this red cow with water. The contaminated person needed to be sprinkled with this ash/water twice throughout a seven day period. He was sprinkled on the third day and seventh day. The ritual was then completed by a full immersion into the water (*mikvah*). Therefore, what Paul is saying in Corinthians is that if the resurrection were not true, why are some people voluntarily becoming unclean by touching a dead body to prepare if for the resurrection because in so doing you would have to undergo a baptism to be purified.

Some added notes of interest can be seen when one realizes that the sacrifice had to be burned outside the Tabernacle. It was burned on the Mount of Olives, across from the Temple Mount according to Jewish history (m.Parah 3:5-10). Likewise, we read in Hebrews, "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned *outside the camp*. And so *Jesus also suffered outside the city gate* to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore" (Hebrews 13:11-13). The death of Jesus, outside the camp, was necessary to cleanse us from the contamination of sin, leading to death.

Hebrews also states, "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb 9:13-14). Yet in the Numbers passage it states, "The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the *third* and *seventh* days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean" (Num 19:19-20). Why the third and seventh days? The third day is clearly associated with the resurrection

and second coming of Christ: "After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence" (Hos 6:2). What about the 7th day? Final redemption is shown in the Shabbat. This is why all the rich resurrection allusions are celebrated in the 7th month of the year and why Hebrews 4 tells us there still remains a "Sabbath rest for all God's people." Clearly there is a rich understanding of the New Testament that is only seen by looking at it through the lens of the Old Testament. The modern church today has missed this, largely due to their anti-Semitic attitudes which keep them from understanding the Jewishness of the Scriptures.

28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

In the Old Testament we have a foreshadowing of the Gentile church becoming envious of God's call to Israel. It is seen when Esau becomes jealous of his father's love for Jacob: "Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac" (Gen 28:6-8). Indeed, God has bound all men over to disobedience in order that He may have mercy on them all. Our father's love should make anyone jealous who is not living in that love.

These verses show that for the sake of the Gospel going out into the Gentile world, the Jews had become enemies as part of God's plan for salvation. However, as for election, God is held to His covenant promises. God chose or elected them for a job. A large part of that job was to make a way for the Gentiles to receive the Gospel as God said to Abraham when giving him His covenant, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3). God's integrity is bound up in this promise because He cannot lie. God's gifts cannot be taken back by Him. Consider the following verses:

- "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill" (Num 23:19)?
- "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind" (1 Sam 15:29).
- "Once for all, I have sworn by My holiness--and I will not lie to David--that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before Me like the sun" (Ps 89:35-36).
- "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:1-2).

- “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged” (Heb 6:18-19).
- “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

Verse 30 reiterates the fact that all men are sinners and are disobedient to God’s Word. As Paul said, “In the past, He let all nations go their own way. Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:16-17). Even among our disobedience, God was showing mercy. Galatians adds, “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:22).

If in our disobedience we have received mercy, why can’t the Jew, in their disobedience also receive mercy if their eyes are opened to the faith of Jesus Christ. Part of God’s mysterious plan was to have the Jews reject the faith so that the Gentiles could receive it. However, the other part of God’s plan is to have their disobedience work for their good in order that they may receive mercy abundantly. The Jewish disobedience as two-fold: 1) to allow the Gentiles to be welcomed into the covenant, and 2) to receive mercy. As Paul stated earlier, “The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Rom 5:20).

In verse 32 the word “bound” literally means to be shut in or taken prisoner to. Because of our flesh we are bound to sin and disobedience, however, this does not mean that we have no way of escape. When a man commits a crime, nobody but himself is to blame. He had the free-choice to commit the crime or simply to walk away. Ultimately, he is in prison because of his own choice. The prison guard is not to blame because he is bound, nor is God to blame because of man’s sin. God has given man a choice to accept or to reject His offer of free grace. Because all men sin, all men need Jesus. Because Jesus offers His grace to all men, it isn’t God’s fault that they choose to reject Him. Nevertheless, it does not negate the fact that all men have been bound in order that God may reveal Himself to everyone. There is a broad way that leads to death and a narrow way that leads to life. The narrow road is broad enough for everyone on earth to go on, it may just be too narrow for you if you are narrow minded. Therefore, one can’t blame God if you are not on the narrow road, you can only blame yourself.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

God’s wisdom and knowledge are rich and deep indeed. Knowledge is the amount of information one has, but wisdom is the ability to apply that knowledge for good use. Many people mock Christians and the Bible because they can’t understand why or how

God did something. If anything, that is further support for this verse and the infallibility of God's Word. If we could understand God's wisdom, we would be just as knowledgeable as He, which would make us God. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Cor 1:25). Though we do not know the full depth of God's knowledge, He has given us special insight into His wisdom: "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor 2:10-13).

God's judgments are unsearchable. Man dare not question God's justice for He sees the heart of man. As God told Samuel, "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). The Psalmist wrote, "Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep" (Ps 36:6).

God's paths are beyond tracing out and trying to do so will only lead you to folly. "That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways'" (Heb 3:10). The Psalmist wrote, "Your path led through the sea, Your way through the mighty waters, though Your footprints were not seen" (Ps 77:19). David also said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (Ps 139:6). Job echoes this truth as well when he said, "But if I go to the east, He is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find Him. When He is at work in the north, I do not see Him; when He turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of Him. But He knows the way that I take" (Job 23:8-10).

Nobody can know God's thoughts and mind although it seems as if so many in the church today think they can. We read in Corinthians, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him" (1 Cor 2:16)? We would do well to let God tell us what is on His mind rather than us telling people what we think God has in mind. Isaiah wrote, "Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed Him as His counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? Who was it that taught Him knowledge or showed Him the path of understanding" (Isa 40:13-14)? How could the creation think that they could enlighten the Creator and tell Him the state of the Jews?

Likewise, there is no one who can counsel God, rather He is the one who counsels and instructs us: "The LORD confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them" (Ps 25:14). Jesus also said, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15).

Is there anyone who has ever given to God in money or deeds that God should be in debt to him? Certainly not. As God told Job, "Who has a claim against Me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me" (Job 41:11). This should make all flesh feel very humble and small. In fact, not only can we not give anything to God to help Him out, we have nothing that He hasn't first given us, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand" (1 Chron 29:14).

Indeed all things come from God. All blessings, all life, all mercy, all grace, all wisdom, all power, all knowledge, all rights and all justice. Because He owns them all, He has every right to give and withhold as He sees fit and as His justice allows. The whole earth is God's yet man likes to think he is in control. Whether it be the political hype of global warming, overpopulation myths, the nations leaders, or the right of God to save the Jew, God is in control. Consider the following verses:

- “Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:4-6).
- “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set His affection on your forefathers and loved them, and He chose you, their descendants, above all the nations” (Deut 10:14-15).
- “The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false” (Ps 24:1-4).
- “If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats” (Ps 50:12-13)?
- “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being” (Rev 4:11).

Yes, all things came from Him, all things are for Him, all things belong to Him: “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor 8:5-6). He alone deserves all glory, praise and control. Nothing in this world has come about by chance or man's creativity, skill or power. Everything has been formed by God giving Him the right to do with it as He pleases. Therefore, when we stop to ponder the amazing and profound plan God has instituted from the beginning of creation it should cause us to give glory and praise to Him who devised it. These closing words should humble man and reveal that he has no right to judge God because of his wrath or mercy. Praise be to God!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

As we said during the beginning of chapter nine, Romans 9-11 really needed to be read in one sitting. I would like to take the time to highlight these three chapters and put them together into a comprehensive unit. To do so I will need to highlight a few of the verses we have already discussed, but in so doing one will be able to see the plan of God's covenant more clearly in context. First of all, however, I want to highlight the importance of the nation of Israel and how they are viewed today. Much of this history can be found in *Judgment Day*, by Dave Hunt.

God is called the God of Israel 203 times in the Bible, yet never is He called the God of Ishmael or the God of the Americans. Over 2500 years ago Zechariah wrote: "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a *cup of trembling unto all the people round about*, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I *make Jerusalem a burdensome stone* for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech 12:2-3). This remarkable prophecy foretold that all the nations around Israel would unite against her. At the time this was written Israel was in ruins and never throughout history were they completely surrounded by enemies until today.

As for Israel being a "Burdensome stone," they make up only 1/1000 of the world's population yet they receive 1/3 of UN time either in deliberation, arguing about or in denouncing them. Zechariah's prophecy is being fulfilled.

Leading Calvinist, John Owen, basing his opinion on Bible prophecy said in the 17th century, "The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth. . .and brought home into their homeland." Bridges for Peace website May 21, 2004.

Martin Luther said, "If the Jews are Abraham's descendants then we would expect to see them back in their own land with a state of their own. But what do we see? We see them living scattered and despised." ([www.pre-trib.org/article view.php?id=218](http://www.pre-trib.org/article/view.php?id=218)). If Luther were alive today, he would have to recant.

We read in Dave Hunt's book, *JUDGMENT DAY*: "Oct 1973 the Yom Kippur War, the attacking Arab forces from Egypt (80,000 Egyptians overwhelmed and slaughtered 500 Israeli defenders along the Suez) and Syria (1400 tanks swept down the Golan with only one Israeli tank in service to oppose them) caught Israel completely by surprise. . . .Dozens of notices were sent by the NSA to the Nixon White House, which had positive evidence at least two days in advance of the attack. Nixon, however, for his own reasons, chose not to notify Israel. . . The White House finally gave Israel a reprehensible few hours notice but insisted that Israel refrain from preemptive strikes and be certain not to fire the first shot. . . The initial success of the attackers, when Israel was trying to mobilize its military and reservists, so electrified the Arab world that nine other Arab states hurried to get in on the slaughter. . . Israel suffered about 3000 dead. . Except for a series of what could only be called miracles from God, Israel would not have survived. History professor David A. Rausch writes, 'Jordan's King Hussein sent two of his best armored brigades to Syria. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait financially underwrote the huge cost while sending thousands of troops to fight the Israelis. Kuwait lent her British-made Lightning jets to Egypt. Libya's Muammar Qaddafi turned over forty French-made Mirage III fighters and 100 tanks. Iraqi MiG fighter jets as well as tank and infantry divisions fought on the Golan Heights, while a squadron of Iraqi Hunter jets was utilized by Egypt. Arabs predicted the extermination of the Jewish state and the 'liberation' of Palestine.'" It was the closest Israel ever came to being defeated. But when the war ended, the Israeli tank columns were on the outskirts of Damascus and Cairo and could have taken those cities had they not been called back for political reasons." (*Judgment Day*, Dave Hunt, pg 10-11). From this quote and many other examples that could be given, we see that God is certainly watching out for the Jew and has not rejected them completely. He is being faithful to His covenant and preserving a remnant by grace.

Zechariah predicted all nations would hate Israel. Why would God bring all nations against Jerusalem? Joel said, "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them

down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with [punish] them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have *scattered* among the nations and *parted my land*." (Joel 3:2). Interestingly, ONLY IN THE LAST 80 YEARS HAS THE LAND BEEN DIVIDED. How did this come about?

The 1917 Balfour Declaration, 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and the 1922 Declaration of Principles of the League of Nations recognized that the ancient land of Israel (which had come to be known as Palestine) belonged to the Jewish people. Instead of following these rulings, in order to curry Arab favor because of their oil, Britain divided it, giving more than 70% to its protégé, Emir Abdullah Hussein. In the UN resolution 181, Nov 29, 1947, the nations joined to further divide the land and Israel received only 13% of what had been designated for the national Jewish homeland. Every so-called peace proposal that the Western powers have since attempted to force upon Israel has been based upon the demand that she relinquish yet more land to the Palestinians. But God has said "the land shall not be sold [or traded] for ever: for the land is mine" (Lev 25:23).

Muhammad said, as recorded in the Sahih Al-Bukhari hadith: "The last day will not come until the Muslims confront the Jews and the Muslims destroy them. In that day Allah will give a voice to the rocks and the trees and they will cry out, 'O Muslim, O Abdullah, there is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him!'" (Moshe Ma'oz, 'The Image of the Jew in Official Arab Literature and Communications Media (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976), 14.) In the eyes of a Muslim, the Jewish state must be crushed! Otherwise, Islam has been proved a false religion.

At a conference of the Islamic Committee for Palestine, in Chicago, Illinois, December 28-31, 1990, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Oudeh, one of the leaders in the Islamic Jihad Movement, declared: "Now Allah is bringing the Jews back to Palestine in large groups from all over the world to their big graveyard where the promise will be realized upon them, and what was destined will be carried out." He was referring to Muhammad's prophecy (in direct opposition to the Bible) that the Muslims would kill all Jews in the last days. This is the attitude that is fueling the fires to fulfill God's prophecies.

Even the Vatican says the Church has replaced Israel as the "people of God." They have opposed Israel consistently, refusing even to recognize its existence until 1994, 46 years after its declaration of independence.

Other examples to be looked at is that today the PLO is in control of the Temple Mount, the very heart and soul of Jerusalem. From 1967-1989, out of 865 resolutions in the Security Council and General Assembly of the UN, 526 were against Israel, yet the last anti-Arab vote was 61 years ago in 1947. The arabs receive support even though the PLO-controlled newspapers have wedding announcements and invitations to join in celebration with families who are rejoicing over the "marriage" of terrorist sons to the "dark-eyed" virgins in Paradise through their "martyrdom" by suicide in Israel. We are seeing exactly what Jesus predicted in Luke, "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24)

Further "trodding down" can be seen at the Temple Mount. When Israel took East Jerusalem in 1967, and her soldiers wept at the Western Wall, it seemed that Jerusalem had at last been liberated from Gentile domination. However, acting on his own, without official approval, General Moseh Dayan, apparently hoping to prove to the Arab nations Israel's peaceful intentions, turned over Temple Mount (the holiest site in Israel) to the king of Jordan. In 1994, Jordan turned it over to the PLO. Currently, the PLO is in the

process of building the largest mosque in the world, underground (weakening supporting walls holding up the Temple Mount and blaming Israel for their collapse).

The PLO claims there never was a Jewish temple on the Temple Mount despite the fact that there are many references in early Arab literature that the Dome of the Rock was built on the site of the ruins of Solomon's temple. (*Judgment Day*, pg 21).

Section 214 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 2003 stated a commitment to relocate the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, yet it still hasn't been moved. In a papal bull of the year 2000 jubilee, John Paul II again rejected Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem. More than 100 official anti-Semitic documents have been issued by the Roman Catholic Church throughout its history. Even the 1st Crusade, inspired by Pope Urban II (who promised salvation to those who fought) slaughtered Jews across Europe. As we discussed earlier, Martin Luther advocated burning down the Jews' homes and giving them the choice between converting or having their tongues torn out. In Eastern Europe there were 5 million Jews in 1930. Today, there are only about 25,000. In 1989 the Polish Catholic Cardinal Joseph Glemp, "accused Jewish survivors of the Holocaust of introducing communism into Poland. . . And introducing Vodka." September, 1993 Nicholas Horthy, (Hitler's friend who presided over the deportation of 437,000 Jews to Auschwitz) was reburied with honors in his hometown 80 miles east of Budapest. A 2003 Eurobarometer opinion poll questioned 500 people from each European Union nation where 59% considered Israel to be the greatest threat to peace of any country in the world (74% in Netherlands). Zionism was a capital crime in Iraq. Saddam Hussein published a pamphlet entitled, "Three Things Allah Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies." The U.S. government had full knowledge from reliable intelligence of the extermination of the Jews at least as early as August 1942. The State Dept. (still anti-Israel today) suppressed the information. Not until Jan 16, 1944 did Roosevelt take action after being persuaded by Sec. of Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr., but only to defray political criticism. The ocean liner St. Louis reached Havana, May 27, 1939 with 930 Jews fleeing Nazi Germany after being invited to Cuba. Cuba changed their mind and demanded \$500,000 each to honor their visas. As a result, Captain Gustav Schroeder tried to get the U.S. to take his passengers but was rejected by them as well. These Jews found refuge in England, Belgium, France and Holland, however, only the 288 in England escaped the Holocaust. Britain said there was no room in Palestine for Jews beyond the White Paper quota of 1939 which set a limit of 10,000 per year for five years. Despite this, over this same period they allowed only 25,000 refugees from Nazi Germany to enter. Later on in the war, desperate for cash, Hitler offered to sell 500,000 Jews for \$2.00 each, but even at that bargain price nobody would ransom them. The Presbyterian Church USA had a Palestinian president in 2002. It's leading campaign was to pressure Caterpillar, Motorola, ITT Industries, and United Technologies to cease sales of military equipment and supplies to Israel under threat of churches divesting themselves of their stock. Clearly, the anti-Semitic philosophy still remains to this day. Why? Because God's prophecies are being fulfilled.

Ultimately, I believe there are two main reasons for this universal hatred of the Jews:

- 1) They are under God's judgment for their rebellion (Deut 28:15-68; 29:24-28; 30:17-20).

- 2) It is inspired of Satan. God's integrity is bound up in Israel. As long as Israel retains autonomy over one square yard of land it is an affront to Islam and declares to the world that Islam is a false religion. The wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 have all been won by God's miracles.

Way back in the Old Testament, the false prophet, Balaam declared that Israel was to be a separate people. "For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and *shall not be reckoned among the nations*" (Num 23:9). Yet this is exactly what we see is happening today. Israel has been a member of the UN for over 50 years but is not allowed to take her two-year turn as one of the ten rotating nations on the UN Security Council. Of the 191 current UN members, 190, including the worst terrorist nations, are allowed to take their turns on the Security Council – but not Israel. Nor is Israel allowed to take a rotating term on the 53 member UN Commission on Human Rights. All other of the 190 UN member nations are allowed to do so. Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East isn't allowed and remains separate as the Bible foretold.

Even among humanitarian organizations Israel is separated from the other nations. Israel is not allowed to be a member of the International Red Cross. World Vision, the largest and one of the oldest independent "evangelical" charitable organizations in the world (founded in 1950) has an annual income exceeding \$1.2 billion. Of all money allocated to the Middle east none of it goes to Israel, everything goes to the Palestinians. (Interestingly, in all of history there were never a Palestinian people).

The Koran is filled with unbiblical claims. It teaches that Noah had another son who refused to enter the Ark and died in the flood. Mary was the sister of Moses and gave birth to Jesus under a palm tree, the golden calf was built by a Samaritan 700 years before they even existed. Yet despite the clear distinctions between the Koran and the Bible, Pope John Paul II, on May 14, 1999, at a ceremony in the Vatican, bowed to and kissed a copy of the Koran presented to him by Shi'ite and Sunni leaders from Iraq.

We read in Genesis "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, *O that Ishmael might live before thee!* And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name *Isaac*: and *I will establish my covenant with him* for an everlasting covenant, and *with his seed after him*. And *as for Ishmael*, I have heard thee: Behold, *I have blessed him*, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. *But my covenant will I establish with Isaac*" (Gen 17:15-21). Even though the Bible is clear that the land and the covenant belongs to Israel, many Christians today believe it should be given to Ishmael and the Muslims.

How did the land of Israel become known as Palestine? Around AD 132 the Romans began to rebuild Jerusalem for Emperor Hadrian as a pagan city with a temple dedicated to Jupiter on the Temple Mount. The Jews revolted, being led by Simon Bar Kochba, who some thought was the Messiah. This revolt was successful at first, but more legions were brought in and 500,000 Jews were killed. When the revolt was over in AD

135, the Romans were angry with the Jews and renamed it Provincia Syria Palestina after the Jewish enemies, the Philistines. From that time forward, all those living there were known as Palestinians. Clearly this is not Palestine, by Israel we are talking about.

If we are honest in dealing with the facts, this is not a battle between Jews and Palestinians, but a battle between God and Allah. Truth is, we need to be praying for both Jews and Palestinians for whom Christ died.

Now let us look at Romans here again in the proper perspective. Remember the basic outline: Romans 9 shows Israel in the PAST was ELECTED, Romans 10 shows Israel in the PRESENT as REJECTED and Romans 11 shows Israel in the FUTURE as ACCEPTED.

Let's read again a portion of chapter 11: "If *some of the branches* have been broken off, and *you, though a wild olive shoot* [Gentiles], have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. *Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.* For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. *Otherwise, you also will be cut off.* And if they do not persist in unbelief, *they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.* After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!" (Rom 11:17-24).

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced *a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.* And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.' As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies *on your account*; but as far as *election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs*, for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient *in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.* For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all." (Rom 11:25-32).

Rom 3:1-4 "*What advantage*, then, is there in *being a Jew*, or what value is there in circumcision? *Much in every way!* First of all, *they* have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith?

Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true [to His covenant], and every man a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.'" Remember, Paul was writing to the Gentile church. He just explained in chapter two that a true Jew must be circumcised in the heart. Naturally, a Gentile would think that if circumcision is that of the heart, what value is there in being a Jew anymore? The answer is "much in every way."

"I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. *Theirs* is the adoption as sons; *theirs* the divine glory, *the covenants*, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and *the promises*. *Theirs* are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Rom 9:1-9).

ADVANTAGES OF BEING A JEW:

Entrusted with the living Word.

v.4a by designation of God Himself.

v.4b adoption as sons as a nation (Christians individually).

v.4c given the visible glory of God.

v.4d the Covenants made for them. It is through our union with Christ that we get in on the benefits of this covenant.

v.4e God's Law given to them.

v.4f The Temple Service

v. 4g Unique promises. Other nations receive the blessing through Israel. (Abraham was to be a blessing to the nations.)

v.5a Whose are the fathers. (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob).

From whom Christ came. Christ is the son of David, an Israelite.

"Remember that at that time you [Gentiles] were separate from Christ, *excluded from citizenship in Israel* and *foreigners to the covenants* of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who *once were far away have been brought near* through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:11-13).

ISRAEL AS "ELECT"

"It is not as though God's word had failed. [real question being answered in Romans 9-11] For not all [doesn't say not any] who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children [Ishmael] who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise [Isaac] who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will

have a son” (Rom 9:6-9). THIS ISN'T ABOUT JEW AND GENTILE, BUT SPIRITUAL OR BELIEVING ISRAEL AMONG PHYSICAL OR UNBELIEVING ISRAEL. ISHMAEL WAS THE SON OF ABRAHAM, YET A GENTILE. ISAAC WAS THE RESULT OF FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE.

“Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God's purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls-she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom 9:10-13). BOTH JACOB AND ESAU WERE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM, BOTH WERE CIRCUMCISED. JACOB BECAME A BELIEVER, ESAU DID NOT. THIS MADE JACOB A TRUE ISRAELITE, ESAU NOT. NOTE, BEING GOOD ENOUGH DOESN'T MATTER EITHER. JACOB WAS OF THE PROMISE AND ESAU, THOUGH A NATURAL CHILD, WAS NOT!

THREE KINDS OF JEWS

1) RACIAL JEW: Has genes of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Does not have to be full blooded. Deut. 7:3, and 23:3 warns against mixed marriages under the Mosaic Law, but before that time, Joseph married an Egyptian and the offspring were Ephraim and Manasseh (half Jew and half Gentile). Despite this, however, Joseph's sons were considered to be part of the tribes of Israel. They had no Jewish mother. Moses married a Midianite and an Ethiopian (both Gentiles). Jesus genealogy has Gentile women like Rahab and Ruth (Mat 1:5).

Basis of a Jew was

- a) Their relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- b) Possessed at least, in part, the genes of Israel.

2) RELIGIOUS JEW: Those seeking to earn God's favor.

- a) Orthodox Jew- Like a modern day Pharisee. They hold to rabbinical teachings as more authoritative than the Torah.
- b) Conservative Jew- They observe the traditions but are more liberal in the religious fundamentals of Jewish life.
- c) Reformed Jew- They don't enforce the traditions and customs and are very liberal in their view of the Bible. A Jew is just who they are.

3) REGENERATE JEW: This is a true Israelite or the REMNANT spoken of when Paul write, “What advantage is there in being a Jew (Is it Racial, Religious or Regenerate)? Much in every way.” (Rom 3:1). There is still an advantage of being a racial Jew *spiritually* born again. In other words, having some Jewish blood and believing in Christ.

Rom 3:9-11 “We have already made the charge that *Jews and Gentiles* alike [there is still a distinction made] are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, *no one who seeks God.*’” [Not even a Jew].

John 6:37,44 “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away... *No one* can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

From these verses we can see that faith is the *result of God drawing us*, NOT the *cause of God drawing us*. No one does good. No one seeks. Not even a Jew. Therefore, it is up to God’s mercy and faithfulness to His covenant that He will draw the Jews to Him again. Does the church behave as if this were true today?

MYSTERY OF GOD’S ELECTION

Adam and Eve sinned. After the Fall, they not only didn’t seek God, but they hid from Him. God sought after them, they didn’t look for Him. What did God do? He sacrificed an animal to cover their sinfulness to foreshadow the Lamb of God who would shed His blood 4,000 years later to cover our sinfulness today. Adam and Eve through faith accepted this gift.

Rom 9:14-17 “What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” [Note, not God’s judgment by predestining some to hell].

Rom 11:5-6 “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” God has chosen, predestined or elected a remnant as a part of His plan for holiness. Yet, God’s election of Israel is the same for individuals today. It doesn’t depend upon man’s efforts or being good enough, because no one seeks God.

Rom 9:22-29 “What if God, *choosing to show His wrath* and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath-*prepared for destruction*? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, *whom He prepared in advance for glory*- even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As He says in Hosea: ‘I will call them “My people” who are not My people; and I will call her “My loved one” who is not My loved one,’ and, ‘It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” they will be called “sons of the living God.”’” Isaiah cries out *concerning Israel*: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only *the remnant* will be saved. For the Lord will

carry out His sentence on earth with speed and finality.’ It is just as Isaiah said previously: ‘Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.’”

Again, note that the righteous remnant (descendants) are here to be a blessing for us! After God *endures* with the *unbeliever* with *great patience*, He may choose to use this rebellion as a way to reveal Himself to those who believe. It is also important to look at the context of Isaiah 10:22-23 which is quoted here. It predicted the judgment upon Assyria for afflicting Israel. God’s wrath would be revealed to those who went against His people. Here in Romans the remnant referred to is put in context with the Lord’s second coming. Therefore, God has a plan for the Jew in the end times.

Deut 8:18 “But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and *so confirms His covenant*, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.”

Deut 9:5-6 “It is not *because of your righteousness* or your integrity that *you are going in to take possession of their land*; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, *to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, [COVENANT]* to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.” Clearly, just because the Jewish nation has been stiff-necked, doesn’t mean God is finished with them. The same is true for any Gentile who is being led into heaven. It isn’t because of our righteousness or special ability to follow the Lord. It is all because of His grace and His faithfulness to the covenant promise.

THE ELECTED REMNANT IN PROPHECY

Deut 4:27, 30-31 “The *LORD will scatter you among the peoples*, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, *then in later days you will return to the LORD* your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; *He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant* with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath.”

Isa 11:11 “In that day the Lord will reach out His hand *a second time* to reclaim *the remnant* that is left of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.”

Jer 23:3 “I Myself will *gather the remnant* of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them.”

Zech 8:3-8 “This is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.’ This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘*Once again* men and women of ripe old age will sit in the *streets of Jerusalem*, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.’ This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘It may seem *marvelous to the remnant* of this people at that time, *but will it seem marvelous to Me?*’ declares the LORD Almighty. This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will *save My people* from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back *to live in Jerusalem*; they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.’”

Jer 50:20 “‘In those days, at that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘search will be made for *Israel's guilt*, but there will *be none*, and for the sins of Judah, but *none will be found*, for I will *forgive the remnant* I spare.’”

1 Cor 10:32-33 “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-” NOTE: 3 kinds of people, unbelieving Jews and Greeks *and* the church (consisting of Jews and Greeks).

Jer 31:35-36 “This is what the LORD says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar--the LORD Almighty is His name: ‘*Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me.*’

Jer 33:23-26 “The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ‘Have you not noticed that these people are saying, “The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms He chose”? [Sounds like the church today] So *they despise My people and no longer regard them as a nation.* [Again, sounds like the church today]. This is what the LORD says: “*If I have not established My covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant* and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For *I will restore* their fortunes and have compassion on them””

Num 14:15-17 “If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land He promised them on oath; so He slaughtered them in the desert.’ “Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared” Note: *If God has indeed permanently rejected the Nation of Israel and transferred to the Church these covenants, then the world could say as Moses, “The Lord was not able.” God is able to make them stand and He will have compassion on whom He*

wants to have compassion, regardless of what the church thinks. He is going to be faithful to His Word.

Ezek 36:22-23 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, *but for the sake of My holy name*, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone."

Rom 11:1-6 "I ask then: Did *God reject His people*? [Note: He emphasizes His continuing relationship with HIS people] By no means! I am an Israelite myself [if God rejected Israel as a nation, then He would have rejected Paul too] a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew. [Israel's falling away didn't surprise God, He knew it and is using it for His plan, ultimately to bring the Gentiles in] Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, *at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace*. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." [If Israel doesn't deserve the grace of Christ, by what right do Gentile Christians deserve it more?]

Rom 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: *first for the Jew*, then for the Gentile."

JUST AS THE FOCUS OF GOD'S BLESSING WAS TAKEN FROM THE JEWS AND TURNED TO GENTILES, IT WILL SOON BE REFOCUSED ON THE JEWS AGAIN.

Ezek 37:24-28 "'My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow My laws and be careful to keep My decrees. They will live in the land I gave to My servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an *everlasting covenant*. I will *establish them* and increase their numbers, and I will put *My sanctuary among them forever*. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be My people. Then the *nations (Gentiles)* will know that I the LORD *make Israel holy, when My sanctuary is among them forever*."

Note that this is NOT THE CHURCH who hasn't ever been scattered in discipline, never have they been divided into two kingdoms, the land of Israel was never

promised to them, as verse 25 says. When the land is given to Jacob, the Gentiles will finally know the truth.

GOD'S PLAN WITH IN THE TEMPORARY REJECTION

Rom 11:11-12 “Again I ask: *Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!* Rather, because of their transgression, *salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. [Even the salvation of the Gentiles is used for the purpose of the future plan of Israel]* But if their transgression means riches for the world, and *their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*” *[when the covenant promises are fulfilled and Israel is restored, the Kingdom of God will come, not before that. Gentiles should be praying for the peace of Jerusalem.]*

Rom 11:15-23 “For if *their rejection* is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their acceptance* be but *life from the dead* [Ezek 37]? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy [*patriarchs*], then the whole batch [*nation of Israel, not necessarily every person born of Abraham as Esau isn't included*] is holy; if the root [*divine covenant*] is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches [*Jews*] have been broken off, and you [*Gentile*], though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, *do not boast over those branches*. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. *Do not be arrogant, but be afraid*. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”

THINGS TO CONSIDER IN THE ROMANS 11 OLIVE TREE

- *THE LIFE OF A GENTILE COMES THROUGH THE JEW, NOT THE JEW FROM THE GENTILE.
- *IT IS MORE NATURAL FOR ISRAEL TO BE RESTORED AS NATURAL BRANCHES.
- *THE GENTILES POSITION IS PRECARIOUS.
- *WILD OLIVE BRANCHES AND NATURAL ONES CAN'T BOTH BE IN THE PLACE OF PREMINENCE.
- *“SOME” OF THE BRANCHES WERE BROKEN OFF. THIS DOESN'T TOTALLY REJECT ALL OF ISRAEL.
- *IT IS STILL THE JEW'S OWN OLIVE TREE.

GOD'S PLAN WITHIN THE TEMPORARY REJECTION

Luke 21:24 “They [nation of Israel] will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. *Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*” [predicted Israel’s national destruction in 70 A.D. from which point the Gentiles have had dominion over the earth, God’s land, city and people.]

Matt 23:37-39 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing.* Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again *until you say*, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" [Just as predicted by Zech. “they will look on Me, the one they pierced.”]

Rom 11:25-32 “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part *until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.* And *so all Israel will be saved*, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And *this is My covenant* with them when I take away their sins." As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but *as far as election is concerned*, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for *God's gifts and His call* are irrevocable. Just as you [GENTILES] who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their [JEWS] disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that *they too may now receive mercy* as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.” THE HOLY SPIRIT USES THESE VERSES TO EXPLAIN THE OLIVE TREE ALLEGORY. VERSE 25 SHOWS THE HARDENING OR CUTTING OFF WAS ONLY FOR A LIMITED TIME.

VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Ezek 37:4-17 “Then He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. *[ISRAEL BORN AS A NATION BUT NO SPIRITUAL LIFE]* Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the

four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet-a vast army. Then He said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, My people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put My Spirit in you and you will live, [SPIRITUAL LIFE] and *I will settle you in your own land.* . . The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, 'Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, 'Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.' *Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand*" (Ezek 37:4-17).

When all of this happens I believe the words of Zechariah will be fulfilled: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the *inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.* They will look on Me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son" (Zech 12:10-11).

GOD'S PLAN FOR RESTORATION

Zech 13:1,8-10 "On that day *a fountain will be opened* to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *to cleanse them from sin and impurity.* . . In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. *This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.* They will *call on My name and I will answer them;* I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

Isa 49:13, 22-23 "Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts His people and *will have compassion on His afflicted ones.* . . This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, *I will beckon to the Gentiles,* I will lift up my banner to the peoples; *they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders.* Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. *They will bow down before you* with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in Me will not be disappointed."

Isa 66:10-13 "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. . . For this is what the LORD says: "*I will extend peace to her like a river,* and the

wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and *you will be comforted over Jerusalem.*"

Zeph 3:11-15, 19-20 "On that day *you will not be put to shame* for all the wrongs you have done to Me, because *I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride*. Never again will you be haughty on My holy hill. But *I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD*. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid." . . . The LORD has *taken away your punishment*, He has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. . . At that time *I will deal with all who oppressed you*; I will rescue the lame and *gather those who have been scattered*. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you *honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth* when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD.

WHY ISRAEL WAS REJECTED FOR NOW

Rom 9:30-10:4 "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? *Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works*. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame." Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

Had they known the true spiritual meaning of the Law, they would have seen God's righteousness (and our lack of) as revealed by the Law.

Mic 7:8-10 "Do not gloat over me, [*Nation of Israel*] my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. *Because I have sinned against Him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until He pleads my case* and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see His righteousness. Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, "Where is the LORD

your God?" My eyes will see her [*Israel's enemy*] downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets."

Micah saw that Israel would be disciplined through the attacks of the enemy, however, he also saw that God would trample her enemy down.

PURPOSE OF THE LAW

- 1) Show man's sin: "For I would not have known what sin was except through the Law." Rom 3:20
- 2) Make man sin more to cause grace to grow more. "Law was added so that sin might increase." Rom 5:20. "Power of sin is the law." (1 Cor 15:56, shows the sin nature gets power when we put ourselves under the principle of the Law.)
- 3) Drive to despair: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal 3:10).
- 4) Lead us to faith in Christ: "Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ" (Gal 3:24). Once there, we "no longer serve in the old way of the written code but in the new way of the Spirit."

Christians should not be anti-Jewish because of the Law. "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." (Rom 3:31). "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means!" (Rom 7:11-13). Think about it!

Romans 12

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Because God has bound all men over to disobedience in their flesh in order that He may have mercy on them all (if they are willing), Paul urges all to respond to that mercy. If Christ would give His very life in order to give this mercy and that we should have eternal life with Him, should we not be willing to offer our bodies to *live* for Him. After all, eternity has already begun, our life experiences will just change when we get rid of these bodies and continue into eternity.

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking to Christians, those who have already received God's *grace* in His making them just and righteous and withholding judgment *we deserve* by placing it upon His Son. This is why he calls them "brothers." Once one is justified, God then gives *mercy*, or blessings that we *don't deserve*. On our end we have nothing to offer when it comes to grace, however, when it comes to mercy we do have something to give. Jesus told us to "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

In order for us to do as Christ did, we show mercy to others by dying to oneself. In the Old Testament animals were killed for justification, however, under the New Covenant, Christ already took care of that once and for all. Now that justification is done, we die to the control of the flesh and live in the spirit which should then control the flesh. “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:20). By dying to self we offer our bodies (the flesh) as living sacrifices and honor God with our body. In essence, this is what Paul said earlier:

“For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the *body of sin* might be done away with, that we should *no longer be slaves to sin* because anyone who has died has *been freed from sin*. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that *we will also live with Him*. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin *once for all*; but the *life He lives, He lives to God*. In the same way, count yourselves *dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus* (Rom 6:6-12).

The same truth is retold in Corinthians as well, “And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor 5:15). When we die to the control of the body, we live in the spirit and this is holiness because there is no sin in the regenerated spirit. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Living in Christ’s holiness is pleasing to God and this is the essence of true worship as we let Christ live in and through us. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). At this time before the cross, this would have been nearly impossible to understand, however, in this post-cross era, we have been instructed here in Romans what Jesus meant. The body is merely the house we live in, but our true identity is in our spirit that we should live in submission to because this is how we worship and follow God. The word used for “spiritual” act of worship implies the mind and further shows that the flesh is not the center of our worship.

In the Old Testament all sacrifices had to be done by the priests. Today, Christ has made His children priests to offer themselves: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5-6).

The living sacrifice is holy and pleasing to God. Only believers in Christ can make these living sacrifices with their bodies because only in Christ have they been made holy. In the Old Testament it was against the law of God to offer any sacrifice that was blemished: “If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the LORD your God” (Deut 15:21-22, also Mal 1:8, Lev 1:3, 3:1, 22:20). Likewise, the unregenerate man can not offer any pleasing sacrifice because anything offered apart from faith in Christ is considered sin (Rom 14:23).

Also, under the old covenant sacrifices were bloody to point to the blood of Christ that would bring about our justification. We are to be “living” sacrifices because there is no need for blood to be shed. We offer our bodies to be used by Christ, not to be killed or burned. Many in the past and some in the present under such legal obligations try to mar and abuse the physical body in hopes of pleasing God. This is not God pleasing, but

rather invokes God's wrath because it minimizes His sacrifice as if it were not enough to make you holy. Somehow they think they can make themselves more holy by their own bodily abuses. This is how the pagans operate and we must not join them. Besides, as we just discussed in the above paragraph, one can't make a sacrifice unless it is first made holy by God already, therefore, beating oneself to be holy isn't a pleasing sacrifice, it only robs God of His glory.

It should also be noted that in telling us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, Paul is telling us not to do evil. There are many within the "church" today that think God's grace allows them to live however they please. In other words, I have been forgiven so why not sin? Paul addressed this in chapter three when he talked of those saying, "Let us do evil that good may result?" Yet Paul continued saying, "Their condemnation is deserved" (Rom 3:8). Peter instructed us to, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16). Also in Galatians the same truth rings loud and clear: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13). In Jude we have a warning to watch out for this very thing: "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 4).

Verse 2 explains further how to live in the Spirit. Rather than continuing to chase after all the world has to offer and conform to its expectations, we are to be separate: "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Cor 6:17). With such a clear command why is that most Christians live, act, dress and go along with the culture of the day? We are not to conform to this world yet it seems that most Christians have blended in very well. Instead, a believer is to, "learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:4-6). Paul writes in Ephesians, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, *to put off your old self*, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be *made new in the attitude of your minds*; and to put on the new self, created to be like God *in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph 4:22-24). If one is being mastered by the flesh, he cannot serve in the spirit. There must be a transformation that only God can do, it is a regenerating of the mind which is controlled by Christ and the spirit: "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). We read, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17-18)! Galatians speaks of this transformation as well: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Gal 6:14-16). Even in the Old Testament it was predicted that we would be made new: "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek 11:19). So what is this new creation we are being transformed into? The Bible tells us, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). This is how we can have the mind of Christ. It is a spiritual renewal of the mind that agrees with God, not the renewed body. The renewal of the body will not come about until the book of Revelation is fulfilled.

Once this transformation is complete, we can test or understand what God's will is in our lives. We won't be distracted by the things of this flesh and world, but we will

rather be focused on our real purpose here on earth. Jesus said, “If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own” (John 7:17). Paul writes in other books, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may *be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless* until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11). The believer will seek to do God’s will as “we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:9-10).

Not only does the regenerate man understand God’s will, but he approves of and agrees with it as well. He has one mind and goal with Christ. This means that even among trials and tribulations, one doesn’t blame or accuse God of being without love and compassion. Instead, he trusts in the Lord that in “all things God works to the good of those who love Him” (Rom 8:28). God’s will is perfect, even among the sin going on all around us. One might say, how can all the evil be good and pleasing. It isn’t the evil that is good and pleasing, but rather the good that God brings out of the evil. He used Pharaoh to proclaim His Name throughout the earth (Ex 9:16). He bound all men to disobedience in order to have mercy on them all (Rom 11:32). He allowed sin to increase His glory (Rom 3:7). He allowed the increase of sin to reveal the increase of His grace (Rom 5:20). We must remember God’s word to Isaiah, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa 55:8-9). Only in the Spirit can the regenerated believer understand and trust God’s good will. Yet because of these corrupt bodies we live in we only see in part God’s perfect will: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Paul just described to us that by Christ renewing our minds we will have wisdom into God’s will. By God’s grace Paul had received wisdom to share with us. First of all, one should not be proud. Instead, to keep from being conceited we should remember that all knowledge comes from the Lord and has been given to us in different measures and ways. Every person on earth has one body but many different parts to that body doing a job for the well-being of the whole. The same is true of the Church body. Paul is not referring to a physical building or a specific denomination, but rather the full number of believers in the kingdom of God. There is one Church that is made up of members from many denominations in many locations around the world. Each individual has a specific function that benefits the whole and are working together for the same goal. As it says in Proverbs, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17). This truth

is supported throughout the Bible: "*The body is a unit*, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all *baptized by one Spirit into one body*-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:12-13). It is the one Spirit of God that is the energizing force that controls the body with Christ as the most important head. With this understanding the body can function properly in humility: "From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16).

This is not to say that one can not be thankful for the gifts God has given him, it simply means don't think of yourself as better than someone else, merely different. Put another way, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in *himself* [literally, "sobriety" in Greek], *without comparing himself to somebody else*, for each one should carry his own load" (Gal 6:2-5). In other words, the only true measure or standard of pride should be our character and deeds done in Christ, not our talents and wealth. We are not to have self-esteem, but Christ-esteem. We also read, "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. *He has lost connection with the Head*, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Col 2:17-19). Christ is the Head that supports all of us. Put another way, John 15 describes God as the Vine and us as the branches who receive their nutrients and life from that all important Vine. The attitude we should have is that of David: "My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me" (Ps 131:1-2). Paul boasted properly in saying, "We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you" (2 Cor 10:13-14). In others, if we boast we boast about what God has done. This is the point of a personal testimony. We don't say, "look what I overcame," but rather, "look what God has done in my life." This is why Paul added, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Cor 12:4-6).

God's gifts are given by the Holy Spirit in proportion to our faith. Jesus, who was filled with the Spirit said, "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit" (John 3:34-35). There was no proportion set for Christ because He had it all. On the other hand, the saints of God have a limited portion in accordance with God's grace and their faith: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. . . It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up until *we all reach unity in the faith* and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature*, attaining to the whole *measure of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph 4:7-13).

The point that there are many members with different jobs is explained well in 1 Corinthians 12:13-31:

“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed *first of all* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *then* workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.”

The close of the above verses shows that there is an order in some of the gifts. I do not want to give the impression that certain gifts do not carry more weight in authority. Again, this is not to say one is more important than the other, but there is a hierarchy of power within the body of Christ. This is seen in a marriage relationship which models this body: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:22-24). Neither the greater or lesser gifts are more important than one another but some gifts do take precedent over the others.

Not only are we to desire and give thanks for these gifts God gives us, we should be sure to use them as well. We read in Timothy the warning: “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim 4:13-14). Also in Peter: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10-11). Gifts are to be opened and used. We may boast properly, which is to boast in the Lord. Likewise, we must not despise the gift given us by comparing ours to other gifts and feeling ashamed because one gift is higher on the chain of authority, “but rather

think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Rom 12:3).

6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

In the parable of the talents Jesus indicates that those who use their “skill talents” will be given more to use, while those who just live their lives ignoring God’s gifts will lose what they have (Mat 5:15-28). Therefore, God gives different gifts to different people, sometimes due to the measure of faith they have in which they will administer this gift. It is up to God’s grace and discretion to give you which gift will best serve Him and you. You do not get to choose your talents and abilities contrary to popular teachings of “you can do whatever you want.” It is best to look at the talents God has given you and then put them to good use for the Kingdom of God. Too many today look at what they wish they had and strive for that because they are serving themselves, not their Lord. It is a gift given by grace, don’t disrespect the giver by complaining about the gift. Instead, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim 4:14).

One of the greatest gifts given is that of prophesying, yet it should be done in proportion to one’s faith. How could one prophesy outside of this measure. The Old Testament tells us that there were those of whom God said, “I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied” (Jer 23:21). How can this happen? Jeremiah explains, “The prophets prophesied by Baal” (Jer 2:8, see also Jer 23:13). Clearly, prophecy doesn’t come only from God so one must determine by what spirit the message comes. Paul discusses this in Corinthians when he says, “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:29-33). In other words, those who prophesy have the Spirit of God and one of the fruits of the Spirit is self control. One should not be out of control or without order when prophesying. Paul also says, “Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:39-40). Also, anything prophesied must line up with God’s Word and must come true or it is not of God and he is a false prophet, “If a prophet, or one who *foretells by dreams*, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods’ (gods you have not known) ‘and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 13:1-3). Paul said, “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen” (Acts 26:22) and, “If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned” (Gal 1:9)!

So what is prophesying? There are three main ideas out there today:

- 1) Telling the future.
- 2) It no longer exists
- 3) Understanding the Bible (God's Word) and being able to relay it.

Let's just look at what the Bible says. The verse we just looked at in Corinthians says that it is a "revelation," which is understanding something that had been hidden. In this sense it could fit theory number 1 or 3. The above verse in Deuteronomy suggests it is fortelling the future because it must come true to be of God. This suggests it fits under theory number 1. In the Old Testament it says that there was a man named, Jeduthun "who prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the LORD" (1 Chron 25:3). Luke gives us a similar prophesy of praise and future information mixed within suggesting both 1 and 3 theories to be correct (Luke 1:67). Clearly, however, just because one praises God doesn't seem to suggest they are prophesying. This is clearly a special gift not given to everyone in every case we see it. Many times people did indeed tell of future events (2 Chron 20:37, Jer 28:6 etc.). It is a gift open to women, "He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied" (Acts 21:9). Also in the New Testament we see Agabus who, "stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)" (Acts 11:28). Clearly this fits under theory 1.

As we see theory number two stating that prophecy is over doesn't seem to be holding up well so far. Also, though it somewhat fits theory 3, which says it is just understanding the Bible, it seems to be much more than that. Every Christian has some understanding of the Bible and would therefore be a prophet. Clearly it is a special gift given only to some Christians. We see in Antioch only a few prophets were within the church: "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul" (Acts 13:1-2, see also 15:32).

Why would people suggest this gift is over and was only used to establish the church? Where does it say this is so in the Bible? Paul says, "Love never fails. But *where there are prophecies, they will cease*; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. *For we know in part and we prophesy in part*, but when perfection comes, *the imperfect disappears*" (1 Cor 13:8-11). The problem with saying that this means prophecy is over is that the context is telling us that it will cease only when the Lord returns again. Right now we know only in part and see as through a dim glass, but when Christ returns and the imperfect disappears, we will then see perfectly and clearly. Until then, we will prophesy to praise, give understanding, and warn of future events as God's Word is expounded upon. When the Lord comes back there will be no more need of that, however, currently there is a need. Why would Paul tell us to seek after this gift if it were not available? We read, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, *but I would rather have you prophesy*. He who prophesies *is greater than one who speaks in tongues*, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1 Cor 14:5). Paul also encourages us to "Eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor 12:31). I see no way to fit theory number 2 into the Biblical context. Likewise, theory 3 has some truth in it, however it minimizes prophecy as a special gift given to only a few,

and the importance of it is diminished. Therefore, theory 1 seems to win out with an addition of the ability to expound upon God's current written Word. Also, we should take warning about denying the existence of prophecy as Paul says, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thess 5:19-21).

Verse 7 says that only some will have a gift of serving. This certainly doesn't mean that only some should serve, but rather that some are gifted in this area and they should excel in this in specific ways. The Scriptures say everyone is to serve the Lord (1 Thess 1:9). Others are to serve in other capacities like deacons (1 Tim 3:10). Yet all are to serve one another in love (Gal 5:13). The serving discussed here, however, seems to be more of a hospitality type of service. We read in Acts, "So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:2-4). Therefore, if a man's gift is teaching he should teach rather than wait on tables. This is one of the problems with pastors today. Just because someone wants to be a pastor doesn't mean he should be one. Perhaps God hasn't given you that ability. It doesn't mean you can't serve the Lord as a deacon, a musician, a server, an encourager or any other number of ministry areas. Many pastors are good, kind hearted people who understand God's Word themselves, yet they can't teach and explain the Word of God clearly to others. They should not be pastors. Likewise, the church can't expect pastors to have all of these gifts. Most churches expect the pastor to have the gift of teaching, serving, leadership, mercy and every other gift. The person who runs his business the best is the one who focuses on one business. They become experts in their field. Focusing on a pastor's gift is not how it works within the church. Remember, these are gifts given to us by God, we don't just choose which ones we want and decide how we will serve the Lord, we let the Lord show us how He wants us to serve Him.

As far as teaching goes, it is good to remember that just as a man can't hear the Word of God without faith, so a man can not teach it without faith. The Psalmist said "I believed; therefore I said, 'I am greatly afflicted'" (Ps 116:10). Also in Corinthians, "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken'" (2 Cor 4:13). One can not speak or teach apart from the grace of God. Also, teaching is very important because it is by preaching the Word that people hear and believe. Therefore the Scriptures tell us, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages'" (1 Tim 5:17-18). Clearly, one should not look down on pastors for being paid well. This particular gift is to be viewed as special (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11).

Verse 8 continues to show that encouraging is a gift as well. I have known people who are certainly gifted in that area. However, be careful to use your gift wisely, without a flattering tongue for "May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue" (Ps 12:3). These gifts are to be used for God, not for our own advantage, "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage" (Jude 16).

Some have been given many blessing because God knows they are gifted in sharing those blessing with others. If God has blessed you with much, He says to "give

generously.” Do not withhold what God has given you because He loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7) for in giving He is glorified: “*Because of the service* by which you have proved yourselves, *men will praise God* for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and *for your generosity in sharing* with them and with everyone else” (2 Cor 9:13). We see a great example of this gift being use even among poverty: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (2 Cor 8:2-4). May this same joy overcome you with your “gift” giving.

If you are gifted in leadership be careful not to use if for your own advantage, but rather “govern diligently.” God appoints leaders for His purpose (Rom 13). They too are worthy of respect, “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thess 5:12-13). We also see that men are to be the head or leader of their houses so there is a command for men to lead their family with careful and hasty purpose (diligence) here as well.

Finally, if your gift is showing mercy, do not do so begrudgingly. You should cheerfully withhold judgment on people and encourage others to do the same. These people make great mediators between arguing parties. Some believe this could actually have been a service within the church as illustrated with widows: “No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, *washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds*” (1 Tim 5:9-10). Perhaps this is something that should be instituted within churches today. Rather than always having the pastor (teacher) go visit the sick, perhaps certain widows and others gifted in mercy should be doing so.

The main point of these verses can be summed up in Peter, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, *faithfully administering God's grace* in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11). And again we read, “*Do not neglect your gift*, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; *give yourself wholly to them*” (1 Tim 4:14-15). Whatever gift God has given you, you must give yourself to it and use if for God’s glory. Do not waste your time chasing after things of this world, but rather invest your time using the gift God gave you to accomplish His purpose for you. Whatever your gift is, use it often and joyfully.

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live

in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

These verses attempt to guide the Christian into a number of duties to benefit the entire Church and allowing one's faith to become ineffective: "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2 Peter 1:5-9).

There are many people who can give the appearance of being loving and caring, yet in their hearts have selfish motives, usually pride and wanting to look good. As we see in 1 John, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). However, Paul is saying love should be sincere. The only form of sincere love comes from God. We love because He first loved us. Love is not just a word but the very essence of God. We read "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13). Love will remain forever because it is eternal. Hope and faith will not be needed in heaven because they will be fulfilled completely, yet love goes on and on as we live in and with Christ. The more we practice and seek after sincere love, the more we have a piece of heaven here on earth. We must remember, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:22-24).

Evil is to be hated. One should not pray to be delivered from temptation or to be led from evil if he does not hate evil and resist it. So many people pray those prayers yet continue to place themselves among situations that lend themselves to evil. An alcoholic should not go to a bar, nor should sin-prone man even look upon pornography or place themselves near any situation that leads to any sin. If we hate something we will stay as far away from it as possible. If Satan showed his true colors to you, there wouldn't be a distance great enough to stay apart. Therefore, do not set boundaries of right and wrong and then allow yourself to walk right up to the boundary line. Instead, make the line and see how far you can stay away from it. Hate evil and don't even come near it as the Bible tells us: "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess 5:21-22). Hating evil is really a type of prerequisite to Christianity and repentance as well: "The Lord knows those who are His, and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'" (2 Tim 2:19). If one doesn't hate evil, he does not have the Spirit of God and is not a changed man.

The best way to stay away from evil is to cling to that which is good, mainly God Himself. If we are so busy clinging to good, there isn't any room for the temptations of evil to make their way into our lives. We can't just keep watching out for Satan's tricks, we need to be seeking the Lord in order for Satan not to be able to even get his foot near the door of our hearts. As we read in the Psalms, "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14).

Verse 10 continues the exhortation to be devoted to each other in love. Devotion is unconditional. Part of love is devotion. It is a state of following and dedicating ones whole being no matter what the consequences or results may be. Here Paul is writing to the church and is telling us that we need to work for the good of the body as individual members of that body. If you are a hand, you should be fully devoted in accomplishing the purpose of the rest of the body. If you honor others above yourself, you will be serving and showing devotion to them. In Peter we read, “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king” (1 Peter 2:16-17).

Verse 11 illustrates that this love, devotion and honor should be displayed zealously. The KJV says not to be “slothful in business.” The context tells us this has to do with the Lord’s business and that is what the NIV is portraying. We should be zealous for the Lord and not become lazy and simply keep our faith to ourselves. This is seen in the parable of the talents where one man just buries his gift rather than investing it. We must invest our lives in the kingdom of God. Don’t be content with being saved and selfishly think that your goal has been accomplished. Your salvation is the beginning of the trip, not the end.

Don’t just add these goals as part of your desire for life, but make these goals your life. To be zealous is to be fixed upon and not distracted by other things. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, He will grant us that zeal. In reality, in doing so we are serving the Lord by serving others. Our attitude in serving others must always be as if we are serving the Lord, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). In serving the Lord, He fills us with His empowering Spirit: Consider the following verses:

- “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).
- “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-14).
- “Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2).
- Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other” (1 Thess 4:9-10).
- “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble” (1 John 2:9-10).
- “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:11-12).
- We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21).

Verse 12 continues that this zeal and fervor should not be laborious, but if sincere, will fill us with joy. Hope does not disappoint us. The hope we have in Christ gives us our zeal and excitement. This is not to say there will not be trials, however, we are patient in going through those trials as we continue to fix our eyes on Jesus and His joy will continue through the trials.

As with everything else, prayer is at the very center of making this possible. We go to God in prayer constantly for the ability and strength to endure patiently and to keep our eyes fixed on the goal: “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Col 4:2-3). This is the point of the parable where the woman continued to press a judge with her request: “Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). In Ephesians we read, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph 6:18). Colossians also tells us to, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message” (Col 4:2-3). All these and many more show that the Christian must not become lazy in their prayer life. We are to be faithful in our prayers as Daniel was three times a day (Dan 6:10) and David his seven times (Ps 119:164). Be committed to make God’s house (which is now your body) a house of prayer (Luke 19:4).

In verse 13 we are told to share our blessings with others and to practice hospitality. Who knows who you may be sharing with: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2-3). “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is one of the requirements of an overseer, “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” (1 Tim 3:1-2, Titus 1:8). Sadly, there will be many of whom Jesus will say, “I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in” (Matt 25:43). This is why Jesus said when sending out the apostles, “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some *worthy person* there and stay at his house until you leave” (Matt 10:11-12).

Interestingly it says to share with “God’s people.” In Scripture we see that our first priority in giving is to watch out for the body of Christ, not the world. When there was a famine in Jerusalem there was an offering collected to help the Church in Judea, “Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:28-30). In Corinthians we see that the collections were being raised for believers, “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income” (1 Cor 16:1-2). This is not to say that we should not be helping unbelievers, however, examining the Scriptures we see that our first priority is to help the body of Christ and “God’s people” who are in need. Galatians supports this truth as well, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal 6:10). There are blessing for sharing our gifts with others, “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly

life” (1 Tim 6:18-19), and “do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb 13:16).

Verse 14 leads into our attitude towards the ungodly. Even those who persecute and curse you, should be blessed and not spoken evil of. As we will see in upcoming verses we are to pray for our enemies and bless them. Do not expect their attitude to change about you, but it is God’s command for us to treat the ungodly with respect and love. Yet, anyone who does look upon God’s children with favor will be rewarded as Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in My Name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward” (Mark 9:41).

We are told to share with each others blessings and trials in verse 15. In other words, be there to support others in all occasions. Celebrate when appropriate yet comfort when needed. These are words that come out of the Proverbs: “Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart” (Prov 25:20). Not only do we help others when we mourn with them, but we are strengthened ourselves. Paul told the Phillipians, “It was good of you to share in my troubles” (Phil 4:14-15). This is all part of God’s body. When one suffers all suffer, when one benefits, all benefit, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor 12:26). This is why Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus.

Finally, verse 16 puts it all together into one common goal, to live at peace with one another. Christianity shouldn’t divide as it has, rather we should be united in one body. No doubt there will be disagreements among the body but in these cases we are given an example of what to do, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us *who are mature* should take such a view of things. And *if on some point you think differently*, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (Phil 3:14-16). Live out your faith in accordance to that which God has given. Be patient and He will reveal things to you as needed and in the meantime, don’t judge your brother for whom Christ has also died. Even in the early church people who were immature lost sight of the goal and began majoring in the minors. Paul had to address this problem of focusing on people and doctrines rather than Jesus:

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: one of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name” (1 Cor 1:10-15).

Clearly Christ is where our unity comes from, not our understanding of the rest of church doctrines. This isn’t to say doctrine isn’t important, yet we must be careful that they do not become sources of division (providing the doctrines are Scriptural).

Sometimes to live at peace means we are to swallow pride and be willing to associate with others in lower positions. As Paul puts it in Ephesians, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). This means we should not be conceited and think more highly of ourselves than others. Unfortunately, this is not the attitude seen in many people among various denominations of Christianity. One denomination views themselves as better than another, somehow being closer to God because of their own beliefs on certain doctrines. All of you have probably seen where a church is divided because of pride and arrogance. It usually begins with gossip and people putting others down rather than lifting them up. At times they are threatened over God’s gifts to others. We see an example of this type of behavior in 3 John: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church” (3 John 9-10). Instead we should have the attitude of Christ:

“Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:1-8).

Now go and do likewise and, “Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor 13:11).

We must remember that Christ has died for all and as long as He is the center of the faith and doctrine of others, they are pleasing and acceptable to God. Don’t be conceited in thinking you have all the right answers. In so doing, you just may be able to live in harmony with other Christians. The Scriptures even warn us to stay away from those who think they have all the answers: “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow” (Col 2:17-19). Paul said, “We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us” (2 Cor 10:13).

This conceit needs to be applied outside of the church as well. In many cases, Christians elevate themselves above the unchurched and look down on others because of clothes, culture, personality or the like. Remember, it isn’t your righteous acts that get you to heaven. You were just as lost and sin-filled apart from Christ. As the old bumper sticker goes, Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven. Thanks be to God, not to yourself due to your own cleverness or decisions, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes

and clever in their own sight” (Isa 5:21). Instead, be humble and seek the good of others over yourself: “Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not” (Jer 45:5). “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones” (Prov 3:7-8).

We must be willing to associate with people who are of low social status. In fact, I believe in many cases these are the most Godly of people because they are unhindered by the cares of this world. The disciples were almost entirely people low on the social totem pole. James warns, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts” (James 2:1-4)?

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This section continues with the theme of the previous one. We are not to think better of ourselves over our enemies for God's grace is available for them as well. Therefore, do not repay evil for evil. What kind of witness is that? It certainly isn't showing the grace God has given us. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Should we not have the same mindset? We must be careful to live at peace with those around us and do what is right in the eyes of those who see us (Remember, God always sees). One should, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that *your daily life may win the respect of outsiders* and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (1 Thess 4:11-12). This is why Paul said, “We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (2 Cor 8:21).

Verses 18-21 remind us again to live at peace with everyone. This will not happen of course, but it shouldn't be because of anything you have done. The world will hate you because of Jesus and your life living for Christ, but their hatred towards you shouldn't be due to your actions or words against them. We are to be different because the “Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:17-18).

Even though the world hates you, you must not return evil for evil as verse 19 explains. Jesus said “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt 5:39). Also, “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44). Think of how many times Paul was beaten and never returned a single blow. Think of how much persecution

Jesus endured and yet never returned an insult. This is the attitude and example we are to follow.

We are not to take revenge, God sees what is going on and if our enemies do not repent, they will receive God's wrath which is far greater than anything man can do. Consider this wise advice: "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil'" (1 Peter 3:8-12). It is written in Deuteronomy 32:35 that vengeance belongs to the Lord. In some cases He will use the authorities He has placed in office to bring a temporary but current judgment upon the wicked (Rom 13), yet in other cases, their punishment may not come until their bodies die. In either case, they can not hide from their sins because God sees all of them.

Verse 20 gives us the alternative to seeking revenge. We are to do what Christ did. Instead of cursing His enemies when on the cross, He prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Likewise Proverbs 25:21-22 are quoted here to show us that we give food and drink to our enemies when they are in need of it. Love your enemy. In some cases this may cause them to back off from pressuring you as Israel's enemies did when Elijah fed them (2 Kings 6:20-25) or as Saul was affected by David's kindness (1 Sam 24:16). In other cases, they will continue to hate you, but God will still avenge you. Those who do not repent will indeed have burning coals heaped upon them because of your kindness. This mercy rejected makes their actions that much more inexcusable and will bring upon God's wrath with that much more intensity and perhaps speed as well. This certainly shouldn't be our motive in feeding our enemies, yet it is the result at times.

To be sure that judgment upon our enemies doesn't become our motive in helping them, Paul closes with a final reminder to not be overcome by these evil motives or any other evil. Instead, make it your goal to overcome evil with love. Jonah fell into the trap of this evil intent. He listened to God and even gave a loving message of repentance to his enemies, however, when finished he went up onto the hill and in his heart was angry when they repented and God didn't judge them. This isn't truly loving our enemies or overcoming evil with good. Let God avenge and we should merely pray for and love our enemies, yet only in Christ can we do so.

Romans 13

13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you

do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Chapter 13 is a great chapter dealing with government authority. There are many today who rebel against the government because of their ungodliness. This rebellion is actually against God and His Word. This is not to say that we should obey the government if they are asking us to do something against the Word of God, however, if it is a matter of losing money or property, we should be willing to submit. Daniel is a good Scriptural example of this, as are Shadrach and Meshach. We read in Acts where Peter and John were being told by the ruling authorities to stop preaching about Jesus and they replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19). Later in the next chapter Peter again states, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)! Therefore, it is clear we are to submit to the governing authorities only providing what they ask doesn't contradict the Scriptures. The things they do that are ungodly you can do nothing about, however, when it comes to your actions, you obey God, not men. In other words, it is okay to obey a pagan ruler, just don't do pagan things yourself. This was the question of the early church who was under the authority of pagan Roman leaders, much like the situation we are in today. David serves a great example where he did not rebel against Saul, but rather recognized Him as being God's anointed and His choice for power at the time. In the end, however, God removed Saul.

Verse 1 clearly says "everyone" must submit to the authorities because God is the one who has allowed them to be in office. In the previous chapter Paul told us not to avenge ourselves. The Christians were living in society where many kings were assassinated because they were poor leaders. Claudius was poisoned, Caligula died in a violent manner and Nero was such an evil man that he too was poisoned but survived. Christians should not avenge themselves but should trust in God as David did. God is sovereign and He is not surprised by who is in power because He has brought them to that power. This is why we are told to "not revile the king even in your thoughts" (Eccl 10:20). Just as God used ungodly Pharaoh to glorify His name, so in the present, our ungodly presidents will be used to bring God glory. God often gives countries leaders they deserve. Right now the United States has become so ungodly, I believe we deserve leaders that will bring judgment. God knows what He is doing.

Verse two explains that since God has established these leaders, even the ungodly ones, anyone who rebels against them is rebelling against God. They will only be able to blame themselves for the judgment they receive in this because they chose not to listen to the Word. They chose to try and protect their own property and rights. Rights are given by God and if He used His authorities to remove those rights, He must have a reason for it. We see other examples that clearly tell us rulers are there because God has allowed it:

- "He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them" (Dan 2:21)
- "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (Dan 4:17).

- “He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: ‘What have you done?’” (Dan 4:35).
- “But it is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another” (Ps 75:7).
- “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by Him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13-15).
- “Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above’” (John 19:11).
- “By Me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just” (Prov 8:15).

Even among ungodly leaders we have nothing to fear as long as we submit to God. Rulers are not going to throw you in prison for obeying them and thus you need not be afraid. One might look at Joseph and disagree. However, it wasn't the rulers but God who allowed and orchestrated this because God had plans to teach and raise Joseph up. Likewise today we should put full trust in God so that if one is wrongly accused, we should remember that God is still in control and He will make things work for the good of those who love Him.

If you want to be free from fear than simply obey the laws (providing they do not go against our worship of Jesus). I have experienced a good example of this in my life. I used to always drive over the speed limit and was constantly on edge as I would be scanning for policeman. As I grew in the Lord, I began to obey the speed laws (most of the time) and I found that I was much more peaceful and relaxed when driving because I didn't need to continue looking for the law. I was free from fear of the ones in authority.

The people in authority have been placed by God to establish order and do you good by this order. It wasn't the God allowed kings to rule to destroy you, but rather to be a benefit for you. Order is a good thing, it would just be better if we had allowed God to be our King. Someday, this is how it will be and we look forward to that day, but until then, we submit to those God has placed here for us. Therefore, anyone who does wrong should be punished and be afraid because the government has been given authority to punish those who break the law. There are those who are against the death penalty, yet the Scriptures support capital punishment as mandated by God. You have been warned and sin does have consequences. We must remember that forgiveness doesn't remove consequences, it simply removes the condemnation of hell. Adam sinned and was forgiven, yet he still was kicked out of the Garden. In short, the law is good when it is used properly (1 Tim 1:9).

This is a perfect illustration of God's kingdom. You break God's law, you should be afraid because He does not bear the sword for nothing either. Adam sinned and death reigned, we sin, we go to hell apart from the blood of Jesus cleansing us from that sin. If we do what is right and allow Jesus to work in our lives we have nothing to fear because the punishment has been taken already. However, if you do wrong and reject Christ, be afraid because His wrath is coming.

Verse five closes this section with a last necessary command to submit to authorities for two reasons: 1) You do wrong you will suffer the consequences, and 2) You disobey the government you disobey God and thus defile your conscience. There is a

spiritual significance in our disobedience to the authorities. The government is not a separate entity from God. We read in the words of Solomon, "Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God" (Eccl 8:2). This may not always be easy, but it is right. The righteous man is one, "Who keeps his oath even when it hurts" (Ps 15:4).

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Part of submitting to the government is paying taxes. Isn't it ironic that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of Mary having to go pay taxes? Even though much of our taxes pay for things we, as Christians, would not want to support, it isn't us paying for it, but the government. The Roman government paid for things of an ungodly nature amidst all of its corruptions, yet Jesus said to give to Caesar what was Caesars. It is the government that will be held responsible for their stewardship. God has still appointed the leaders and the money really belongs to them anyway. We belong to God but live in this world. Without taxes, governing authorities would not be able to govern. No doubt they do not spend our taxes wisely, yet that isn't our concern. Our concern is to preach the Gospel, and when this is done, God will work in people's hearts among the government.

A very important distinction of giving can be made by examining these verses. When we pay taxes, we are not giving money to God in tithe or for church work. You are giving money as a debt (v.8) for all the blessings that come from government, even corrupt ones. You drive on their roads, benefit from many of their laws meant to protect us and currently, can make use of the religious freedom we have. Therefore, taxes were never meant to be confused with giving money to God. Likewise, government should never be confused with God. Government is God's way of worldly order, however, the Church (people, not the building) is God's way of spreading spiritual order. This is also why church leaders are to be paid (1 Tim 5:17). God sees the government as a separate entity to the Church.

Verse 7 takes taxes a bit further. If you owe taxes or revenue of any sort, pay them back regardless of who it is. If anyone is deserving of respect then give them respect. This doesn't speak of respecting one's character, but of our responsibility of showing respect to the position of authority that person is in. In some cases this means the office deserves our respect, but the person in that office may not. The Bible says we are to honor and respect our parents (Lev 19:3) yet in some cases parents may be ungodly. This doesn't give a child the right to disrespect their parents, they must still obey them regardless of their opinions. (Here again the same rule applies as with the government, we obey providing it doesn't go against God's Word). If someone is deserving of honor, then we should give him honor as well. There are a number of

Biblical examples of respect being given to leaders. Paul said to Felix, “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude” (Acts 24:2-3). Clearly, even ungodly men are used by God to bring blessings to His people.

Verse 8 refers to debt which is very fitting for today’s world. No debt should be left unpaid and therefore, even those who file for bankruptcy should eventually pay their debt back. We should not be spending money we do not have on things we need not have if we owe someone else anything. David said, “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously” (Ps 37:21).

Verses 8-10 also takes the focus off of money and puts it on the greater importance of love. Love is called a debt because we can only love because Christ first loved us (1 John 4:19). If we love people as God does, our money is of no concern. We should gladly give up all of our possession just to share the love of Christ with others. In so doing we fulfill all of the law. How? Verse 9 answers that by listing four specific commandments against adultery, murder, stealing and coveting plus includes all other commandments in a general phrase. Looking at these we see that if you love your neighbor, you certainly are not going to cheat on him with his wife, you certainly wouldn’t kill him, steal from him or desire his possessions. Instead, you will be happy for him, pray for him, look out for their needs and concerns. Love never seeks to harm and therefore if we can master this one command, all others will automatically be fulfilled.

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Even 2,000 years ago Paul was telling us that the present time is of utmost importance to wake up and follow Jesus. This statement would be true even 10,000 years from now because life is short during any era of history. No one knows when they will die, you may not have another breath so now is the time to wake up. The hour has come because the day of salvation begins an eternity of life with Christ. Why lose out on the blessings of tomorrow that you can have today?

Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. What does this mean? Everyday that passes brings us one day closer to the Lord’s return or the day we meet our Maker.

Verses 12-14 explains that the time of spiritual darkness is almost over. The Lord will come back and bring spiritual understanding soon so, in the meantime, we are to live in eager expectation of that event, not being distracted by the cares of this world or the desires of the flesh. We are to serve in the Spirit and seek after spiritual things. We must put aside all deeds of darkness. This does not mean just put aside evil, but we must replace the void of the fleshly desires with spiritual things of God: “So I say, live by the Spirit,

and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Gal 5:16-18).

Verse 13 illustrates that most evil takes place at night. When darkness appears, evil comes out and then when the sun rises and gives its light, much of the evil goes away. This truth is poetically illustrated when God said to Job “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it” (Job 38:12-13). John said, “Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed” (John 3:20, see also Eph 5:11-13). It is in the evening that most drinking, debauchery, carousing, sexual immorality and killing goes on. The very nature of things teaches us that it is not good to live in darkness. What is darkness? It is simply the absence of light just as cold is the absence of heat. In heaven there is no sun and yet no darkness because the true Light of the World fills everything there. There is no place where there will be any absence of Christ. Therefore, here on earth we strive not to live apart from God in darkness in the absence of Christ, but to be near Him in the light of His Word. “God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7). The Gospel is the light we run to as our backs are turned to the evils of darkness or being absent from Christ in any form. Isaiah predicted the coming of Israel’s light, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa 60:1-3). Though we once lived in darkness, God has made it possible for us to live in His light in His covenant given to His people.

We must be careful to focus on the light because taking our eyes off of Jesus for just a few minutes allows darkness to come into our lives. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins illustrates the slumber that comes over people when they fall asleep and forget that the day is near: “The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep” (Matt 25:5). Therefore, we must “clothe” ourselves with Jesus, being fully covered by His light and grace (1 Thes 5:5) and being expectant for His return. How do we become clothed? In Galatians we read, “You are all sons of God through *faith* in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were *baptized into Christ* have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:26-27).

We are also warned to, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son” (Heb 12:14-16). Esau didn’t think the things of heaven were as important as the temporal things like the hunger of the flesh. He wanted his blessings now and wasn’t concerned about the future. He gave up his eternal birthright in order to live in the flesh and darkness. Understanding the day is near may keep you from selling your birthright. It may be understood by imagining that you won the lottery of \$10 million. The only catch is you don’t receive a penny of it for another 35 years. It would

be very easy to live life as if you never one the lottery until 34 years had passed. We have gained something much greater than the lottery yet many have fallen asleep with this knowledge. We benefit from the pay-off right now. As believers in Christ who live in the light, there are earthly benefits right now. What are you waiting for? Wake up!

I believe we are living in exciting times as the handwriting is on the wall. Jesus will return soon yet I see most of the world sleeping. Oh, if men would only heed these words in this section. Jesus said, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Who will wake up and lift up their heads to see what is taking place in the world today? Those who live in the light can see, but those in darkness can not see events unfolding. Let us speed the coming of the Lord: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:11-12).

The more one believes in something the more he will speak out and be excited about that truth. Therefore, the more we realize that our complete salvation and deliverance in the Lord's return is nearer now than ever before will cause us to fix our eyes on the prize and not be distracted by anything else. If we truly believe the day is near, we will fulfill the commandments of God by lovingly speaking out to our neighbors and looking forward to this day with great excitement. This same truth is given again in Thessalonians: "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet" (1 Thess 5:5-9).

The last portion of this entire chapter could be explained in just a few verses below:

"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:3-11).

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Eph 5:8-14).

Romans 14

14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2 one man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Continuing the theme of love and being united in the body of Christ, Paul discusses the topic of clean and unclean food, among other differences between Jews and Gentiles.

Christians are to accept those whose faith is weak without judging them when it comes to disputable matters. Today, many denominations are separated over disputable matters and each one thinks the other is weak. Which one is really the weaker one? Paul explains in verse two. One man eats everything, meat and vegetables because he understands that the kingdom of God isn't about food. According to Paul this is living out the faith. The man who eats vegetables only, because he feels it is sinful to eat meat, has a weaker faith because he does not understand the freedom the believers have in Christ. This can be misunderstood if not read carefully in context with the rest of Scripture. Paul was not saying it was okay to eat meat with blood in it or that unclean animals were okay to eat. To do so would contradict other Scriptures. The context of these verses must be taken into context with the rest of the Bible. Remember, no jot or tittle can be taken away from God's word as long as earth remains (Mat 5:18; 24:35). No where does the Bible indicate unclean animals were okay to eat. I know some believe that Peter's vision of the sheet being lowered was giving him permission to eat unclean animals, however, the Bible itself explains that this had nothing to do with food, but the Gentiles being welcomed into the church (Acts 10:27-29). God used an example of unclean animals to represent the Gentiles whose lifestyle was considered unclean by the Jews. Therefore, Paul wouldn't be saying that the Scriptures in the Old Testament are null and void. So how do we make sense of this? In every case in which a Scripture is used to try and support the Old Testament being nullified, it is taken out of context. By simply understanding that the Jews had many traditions and laws that were viewed as being from God, yet were not Biblical, the answer can be found easily. In each case Paul is referring to man-made customs. Consider the following examples:

“Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. [a tradition started by the Jews because Gentiles were unclean]. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’ [notice the word “customs,” not God’s laws]. “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:12-16).

The Gentiles being welcomed into the church were given certain important standards or sins to stay away from. These rules sound much like Old Testament ways, yet they were told to live them in a New Testament Christianity. “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19-21). Since Moses was preached in every town on the Sabbath they should know the basic laws of God already, therefore, it was unnecessary to list them, these were basic rules given that were not listed clearly by Moses.

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col 2:16-18) NIV. Now look at the same verse in the more reliable KJV, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: [note plural form of sabbath days] Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.” Here we see a different meaning. The word “is” is in italics. The KJV does this when the word is not in the original. Therefore the text says not to let anyone judge you about these days, “but the body of Christ.” In other words, don’t let the world judge you based upon your religious practices because these things are a shadow of Christ. This is why Passover, Tabernacles, the Day of Atonment and the Feast of Trumpets are still a shadow of the Lord’s second coming.

““Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come

evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'" (Matt 15:16-20). Here Jesus addressed a man-made tradition of washing hands that is not found in the Old Testament. It wasn't about unclean food but unclean hands. The truth of this fact still would apply to unclean food, however. It isn't the food we eat that gets us saved, it is faith alone. Likewise, it isn't the lies we have not told that keep us from heaven, it is faith alone. However, does this mean that because we are forgiven sins that we should go ahead and lie? Certainly not.

"If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, [again this would go against Jewish custom, not Biblical principles] eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, [once more the context shows this would be clean meat because pork wasn't sacrificed] 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake- the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?" (1 Cor 10:27-30). The end result is that you were not to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. We obey God, regardless of reasons, however, if you had eaten this food, it wouldn't condemn you, but it is best not to for the sake of the other person. That idol means nothing to you, but it might to them. Paul explains further, "Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:19-21). This is most probable why Daniel chose not to eat the king's meat in Babylon (Dan 1:8-16).

"Formerly, *when you did not know God*, you were slaves to those who by nature *are not gods*. But *now that you know God*-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are *turning back to those weak and miserable principles*? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are *observing special days and months and seasons and years*! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you" (Gal 4:8-11). These verses are often quoted to show that the Lord's festivals are no longer applicable to life. The context isn't about the Lord's festivals, but about pagan days, months and seasons etc. Paul is referring to those who used to worship other gods and followed their days and years. To those who now know Christ, why would you want to turn back to those pagan ways?

We see no example of where any disciple actually ate unclean meat or went against the Old Testament commands of any sort. In fact, the

opposite was true. When it was being said that Paul did not follow the laws of Moses he took steps to prove otherwise: “They have been informed that *you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses*, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. *Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.* As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts 21:20-25). Paul did what they suggested and the earlier commands to the Gentiles were repeated again.

Allow me to explain a bit further the requirements given to the Gentile church mentioned in Acts 15 and 21. To do so I may repeat a little bit of what I just did but I think is important to grasp an understanding of this important topic. Back in Genesis 1:29-30 we see that man was created to be vegetarian. In Genesis 9 however, God adds meat to our diet with the restriction of staying away from unclean animals and not eating anything with the lifeblood in it (Lev 17:12). Blood is a very important substance as scientifically and Biblically speaking, it indeed appears to be where life resides. Leviticus gives us further insight into why blood was not to be eaten, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life” (Lev 17:11). In other words, if the blood makes atonement for our life and the blood is life, it was the life of the animals that made atonement for our lives under the old covenant law. The animal's blood (life) covered our sinfulness and made atonement for us. This also foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice to come: “Nor did He [Jesus] enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood [life] that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him” (Heb 9:25-28). Christ's blood (life) was shed once for all (Rom 6:10) to cover our sins permanently so that the life of animals was no longer needed to preserve our lives.

We see how Satan attempts to distort God's Word today and in the past. Scripture states that the life is in the blood. The word for life is *nephesh* which is “soul.” Therefore our soul is in the blood or our soul is life. Many following the ways of evil have put into practice in the various rituals, the drinking of blood in hopes that the life or characteristics of that blood would be incorporated into ones own. This is clearly sinful and a tool of the devil.

We often say that the Old Testament laws are not necessary for us today since we live under the New Covenant of Christ. Indeed we need not follow these laws for

salvation (although we will follow them anyway out of love and devotion) however, what we just read in Genesis is not from the Levitical law. When the Gentiles in the New Testament were being brought into the church this is what was required of them: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:19-20). Even in the New Testament era we would do well to abstain from the lifeblood just as it was stated to Noah. Why?

We must remember that these commands were given to Noah before the Levitical law was instituted. Noah was given permission to eat meat and so is the New Testament church (Rom 14; 1 Tim 4:3-4; Acts 10:15), just not unclean meat. The Noahic laws seem to still be in effect. We read in Hebrews, "Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 6:20). Melchizedek was a priest in the time of Abraham of whom we know little. It is said that he was "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever" (Heb 7:3). It is as if those from the time of Noah to Abraham lived in a period of grace, not salvation by law as those under the Levitical priesthood. They were, "in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron" (Heb 7:11). Perhaps that is why we read of Abraham, "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Rom 4:2-5). Also, "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom 4:9-11). And, "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom 4:23-24). Therefore, Adam and Noah were saved through faith in God and the Christ as the coming Messiah just as, we too, are saved through faith. Therefore, the Noahic commands given here are also meaningful in our lives today.

Let us examine the Acts 15 passage in more depth. The Gentile believers were to abstain from four things: 1) food sacrificed to idols 2) sexual immorality 3) strangled animals 4) blood. All four of these have a common bond, that being all of them deal with unity or "oneness" with someone or something. First, food sacrificed to idols would be like having communion with false gods. When a sacrifice to Baal or any other god was done, the food was then eaten and you partook of a communion meal with that god. When we think about it, Christ was a "food" sacrificed to the true God. Today we still celebrate this and participate in this ritual in our practice of the Lord's Supper, which really was the Passover meal. When eating the "bread of life" we take in Christ's life into our bodies, becoming one. We read in John, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **remains in Me, and I in him**. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the

one who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the Bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this Bread will live forever" (John 6:54-58). To have this kind of "fellowship" with anything or anyone but Christ would be a grave error.

Second, sexual immorality would also go against the oneness reserved only for Christ. "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one Husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him" (2 Cor 11:2). This is why we see the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22 and the final fulfillment of this parable in Revelation: "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" (Rev 19:7-8). The Scriptures make it clear that to have sexual relations with someone means to become ONE with them since, "the two became one flesh" (Matt 19:5). We also see this truth in Corinthians where we read, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and **unite them** with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute **is one with her in body**? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord **is one with Him** in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. **All other sins a man commits are outside his body**, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is **in you**, whom you have received from God? You are not your own" (1 Cor 6:15-19). Therefore, sexual immorality compromises our unity in Christ just as food sacrificed to idols did.

Third, not eating meat with blood in it and abstaining from strangled animals are one and the same. An animal that is strangled does not have all of its blood drained properly and, therefore, to eat of this animal would be to eat of its blood. As discussed above, the life is in the blood and, therefore, you are partaking of the *nephesh* of someone or something other than Christ. This is why Christ's blood is reserved for us. The Passover meal was intended to show us that Christ's blood or *nephesh* (soul) is shed for forgiveness and a unity with Him. As seen earlier, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him" (John 6:56; see also 1 Cor 11:27). Therefore, all of these commands to the Gentile church deal with the compromising of oneness in Christ. We are to be one with only One.

The same truth is found in these verses of Romans. Paul wasn't giving permission to go against the Old Testament, he was saying that it was okay to eat the permissible meat even though others were saying you should be vegetarians. This isn't to say that it is wrong to be a vegetarian, but it shouldn't be out of fear of sin because nowhere in the Bible does it say we should be accept in the pre-Flood world. Post-Flood, God gave man permission to eat clean animals. Remember that unclean animals were still forbidden, even though the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood had not yet begun. Remember as well that during this time people were living in the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is what we are in today (Gen 14:18, Heb 6:20; Hebrews 7). In our current society, many have a presupposition that God has done away with certain laws of the Old Testament. However, if one gets rid of that presupposition and simply looks at the Word we see that never does it say that clearly. The interpretation given here certainly fits the context of the text

without Jesus going back on His Word when He clearly says not one jot will pass away from His Word as long as earth endures. Last I checked, earth was still here.

Those people whose faith was weak were using customs and traditions as a means of holiness and justification. This is the same trap Peter was falling into with the circumcision group in one of the above examples. Likewise, today churches are filled with man-made traditions that are elevated above or added to the Scriptures. If a cross is covered up in church it is as if Satan has entered the building. If a certain prayer isn't said every week, people are upset. If the altar isn't set up perfectly apparently they think hell is imminent. If one has a tattoo, they must not be a believer. If you aren't dressed up for church, you can't be a true Christian. The list could go on and on, yet these are the type of things Paul is referring to as those whose faith is weak.

Verse 3 continues by explaining that the man who eats everything [that is within the context of Scripture, meaning all clean or permissible meat] must not look down on those who follow man-made traditions and eat no meat, including clean meat. Likewise, the man who eats only vegetables shouldn't look down on the man who eats clean meat. God has accepted both because they are eating or not eating for the Lord.

Verse four tells us that we are all God's servants and we answer to our Master and His Word. The man of weak faith and the man with freedom in Christ will both stand because it is a matter of faith in which God makes us stand. God looks at the heart and motives of man's actions. Again, this isn't to say that a man can commit murder with good intentions. This goes against God's law and the man who would justify going against His Masters's Words in order to fulfill a desire of the flesh has deceived himself into believing a lie for his own benefit.

I am not telling anyone that they must not eat unclean meat today in order to be saved. However, I do believe the Scriptures of the Old Testament are still valid today and have not been revoked. Therefore, if God's Word tells us not to eat unclean meat we would do well not to. It isn't a matter of salvation, but rather a matter of blessings and a sanctifying process that goes along with our justification received only by faith in Christ. With that said, we must also be careful not to fall into the trap of judging those who believe God's Word to be valid. There are many out there who judge poorly those who choose not to eat pork or other unclean animals today. The Bible warns us not to do so, therefore, if you are offended by those who choose to abstain out of conviction for the Lord, you should be examining yourself because this offense is not Godly. The Lord is able to make all men of faith stand, so why not be united with them in Christ? To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence *without fault and with great joy*-to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25).

5 one man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

The same basic principle is applied to these verses as to the first four. Paul is not saying that the Lord's Festivals are over and done with, however, the Pharisees had extra days added to God's Word by their traditions. Some considered a certain day the most sacred day of the week or year, while another man considered every day the same. Neither idea is bad and the one who considers a certain day as special is not under the weak faith category here. We really should consider every day sacred to the Lord. There are some today that have the same issues that were going on back in Paul's day. The Jews had added days of feasting and fasting that are not recorded in the Old Testament. Even though Christmas is not a Biblical Holiday, but actually was a pagan celebration to worship the sun that was simply Christianized, there are those who consider it or Easter the most sacred days of the year. (Easter is also a pagan holiday that was Christianized. You can read our commentary on Exodus posted on our website www.creationinstruction.org for more information). Does this mean that those who consider December 25th as sacred are unholy themselves? Absolutely not! Does this mean that those who celebrate the Feast of Passover rather than Easter are unholy. Absolutely not! The point is that each person must be convinced in his own mind that what he does is not against the Word of God and be sure that the motives of the day are Christ centered. The point of the Biblical Festivals was to make sure that some days were set aside to remember what God had done and to foreshadow what He would do. The Sabbath is another good example that God said would be a sign: "Keep My Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God" (Ezek 20:20). I believe the Sabbath continues to be a sign of the Lord's rest to come as Hebrews 4 clearly tells us. Even though there were specific rules for the Sabbath and it was to be kept holy (and is to this day), it doesn't mean the other days should not be kept holy as well. Likewise there are those who say Sunday is the Sabbath, others say Saturday. One is Biblically set forever as the Sabbath and one was instituted by man's reason, but both are holy if Christ is the center of that day.

I believe it is a good practice to measure whatever we do by looking at the Bible, not man-made history, but whatever day one chooses to keep holy must be done so to the Lord and one should be "fully" convinced that it is right to do so. In the same way, it is best to determine our eating habits from the Bible, but if one man chooses not to eat any meat at all because he is convinced that it isn't right to do so, than give thanks to God for the vegetables and eat only vegetables. However, if you have doubts about your food or sacred days it is best not to do whatever it is you have doubts about as we will see in verse 23.

Verses 7-8 close by giving a reason for the acceptance of either philosophy. We do not live or die for our sole purposes. We live and die for Christ. What we accept or whatever we reject should be done with the attitude of thanksgiving and desire of obedience to our Lord. Everything we do in life should be held up to the magnifying glass of God's Word. Two people can come to two different conclusions using the same Scriptures. It is simply important that one uses those Scriptures and use them in context with the rest of the Bible. One can't justify something he does by twisting the Scriptures. Jesus warned, "A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or Me" (John 16:2-3). If one uses the Bible as a whole in context, he will be kept from going

astray and will live his life out for the Lord. We should do only what the Father through Jesus has told us to do. Jesus said the following:

“My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him who sent Me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him” (John 7:16-19).

“For I did not speak of My own accord, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say” (John 12:49-50).

“The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work” (John 14:10-11).

We also read in Timothy, “Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:14-16). In handling this truth we must always keep the perspective of our goal. The kingdom of God isn't about food and drink or what day one worships on, it is keeping Christ as the center of our very lives. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:31-11:1).

9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

For the very reason of our freedom from sin is why Christ died and returned to life. This is what Paul has been saying throughout this entire book. We have been set free from sin and are now slaves to righteousness.

Christ is Lord of the living and the dead. This can mean dead in Christ or dead in the body and alive in Christ or alive in the body. Either way, He is Lord and even the lost will one day acknowledge this fact as verse 11 states. Likewise we see similar truth given in Phillipians: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). This quotation is coming from Isaiah which gives us further detail into the confessions being made: “Before Me every knee will bow; by Me every tongue will swear. They will say of Me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and

strength.’ All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult” (Isa 45:23-25). When these people bow down to the Lord they will be in the deepest of shame over what they thought was self righteousness, yet the Godly will be praising in the deepest joy found only in Christ Jesus, our Savior. It won’t matter what food they were eating or not eating or what day they considered the most sacred, it will all depend upon the Lord’s righteousness alone.

Verse 10 begs the question of why the Church continues to argue among themselves over such doctrines. If we are one body and need each part to function as intended, why are we looking at our Christian brothers as if they aren’t good enough for Christ. “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load” (Gal 6:3-5). Nobody on earth can claim they have the corner on truth. We can only take what we believe to the Cornerstone of Truth, Jesus Christ. When we measure our beliefs according to this Word of Truth, we will be commended at the judgment throne. If what we believe is simply based upon human traditions and self-seeking attitudes, we will lose those rewards. In Corinthians Paul states, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). The fulfillment of this was seen by John in Revelation where we read, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:11-15).

Let’s discuss these Revelation verses in reference to standing before God’s judgment seat. In Revelation we see all of the dead were standing before the throne waiting for their judgment. Books were opened to determine the extent of the judgment as well. Note that it is not one book, but plural books. Typically, we only think of the Book of Life, which is mentioned after these books. The book of life is mentioned many times throughout Scripture:

- “But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Exo 32:32).
- “May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous” (Psa 69:28).
- “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered” (Dan 12:1).

- “Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil 4:3).
- “Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored His name” (Mal 3:16).
- “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).
- “He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels” (Rev 3:5 see also Rev 13:8, 22:19, 21:27, and 17:8).

That is the book of life, but what are the other books? Though we can't be certain, there seem to be books that record your works, not your righteousness.

- In Romans we see that perhaps there is a book of conscience: “since they show that the requirements of the law *are written* on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (Rom 2:15).
- Matthew suggests a book for words: “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mat 12:36).
- We also see a record of public works: “For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done” (Mat 16:27). And, “It is not surprising, then, if His servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Cor 11:15).
- Perhaps also a book of secret words: “This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares” (Rom 2:16).
- “The LORD will never be willing to forgive him; His wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon Him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven” (Deu 29:20).

Revelation 20:12 told us that the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in these books. It seems that their bodies will rise for this judgment, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead” (Isa 26:19). However, Revelation 20:13 suggests that those being judged here are

all evil, because they come from the sea and hell. The end result is that they are cast into hell again. This judgment simply makes it official and more complete.

Revelation 20:14 tells us that even death and hades are cast into the lake of fire. Paul wrote, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:26).

If anyone’s name was not found in the Book of Life, they were thrown into the lake of fire, their second and final death. A very important thing to realize is that when a Christian sins and repents, his sins are forgiven and remembered no more. We read in Psalms, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psa 103:12). That is why Paul wrote, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom 4:7).

Therefore, these books may be primarily for the ungodly, to see which part of hell they are to be thrown into. God will not judge our *salvation* by our works. On the other hand, our works show the measure of our faith, which is why, “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). While God does record the evil deeds of the ungodly, only the good deeds of the Christian are remembered. It is possible that the plural books are used to judge the dead in Christ, while the book of life was used to determine those who had salvation. That may be why they are separated in their descriptions. If your name is not found in the book of life, you are blotted out, and will be remembered no more. To say it is blotted out suggests that everyone has their name in the Book of Life until they reject God’s grace and forgiveness. Family members who are not Christians will no longer be remembered, because that would make for a sad heavenly existence knowing your loved ones are suffering in hell. That is why Isaiah says, “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. *The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind*” (Isa 65:17). Note that this is at the time that the new heavens and earth are being created, just as we saw the earth going away here in Revelation.

Note also that there are degrees of glory in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell. There are many passages supporting this. Consider the following verses:

- “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:47-48).
- “The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:8).
- “Your mina has earned ten more. ‘Well done, My good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’ Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what You did not put in and reap what You did not sow.’ His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew,

did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, *more will be given*, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away'" (Luke 19:17-26).

- "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3).
- "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, *which is Jesus Christ*. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the *Day* [note capital "D" means final day] will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will **suffer loss**; he *himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*" (1 Cor 3:11-15).
- "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (Jer 17:10).
- "For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done" (Mat 16:27).

For some these glories of heaven are confusing, however, they do not realize that God has much more to offer than just salvation. He wants His children to have the best, and to grow up being the best they can be. He has many blessings that go along with salvation if we will only do what it takes to get them. We can go through life believing in and accepting Jesus as our personal Savior, but doing nothing about it and still be saved. However, if we daily read our Bible and go to the source of these blessings, the Holy Spirit will fill you with joy and peace on this earth, despite trials and temptations. Likewise, those who use their faith and do many good works will be rewarded for showing others the righteousness that comes from Christ. If we hide this information and only keep it a personal and private faith, there may not be as much of a reward.

I like to look at it as a 16 oz. glass versus a 32 oz. glass. In heaven, those who build upon the foundation of Jesus with hay and straw, or nothing of value, will be saved. However, in heaven they will only be a 16 oz. cup plum full to the brim. Those who build upon the foundation of Christ with gold and silver, the precious things of good works and faith sharing etc., will be rewarded with the 32 oz. cup plum full to the brim. Whether you are a 16 oz. or 32 oz. Cup, you will be as happy as you can be. You are plum full and can hold no more. Though one gets more than the other, there is no jealousy because you don't know any better. For example, imagine you just ate all the cake you could eat and you are plum full. Now you see someone else eating cake across the room. Will you covet that cake? Not at all, because you are as full as you can be. If your 16 oz. cup wasn't full you may desire more, but as long as your full, you are satisfied and long for nothing else. God disciplines those He loves, because He not only wants all of His children to be saved, but to be the 32 and 64 oz. cups in heaven. He

wants you to be as successful as you can be when you grow up, not into adulthood, but into spiritual maturity.

Therefore, though the dead are judged by the bad they do, the Christians will only be judged by their good and how much of it there was. Their faith (not works) gets their names in the Book of Life, and if your name is there, salvation is yours. In either case God receives glory.

Another important note on verse 11 is that in the verse quoted from Isaiah the speaker calls Himself Yahweh, which is the Name given only to God. Paul applies these words to Jesus, and thus, Jesus is God. Also, Jesus is the Judge because the Father has attributed this job to Him: “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22-23), “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim 4:1), and “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’ . . . Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt 25:31-41).

As we said, EVERY person in the entire world will stand before their judge and acknowledge Him as Lord and even those cast into hell will know it is justice that is being served. Even they will bow down and confess to God all their sins while the believers will bow down and confess Christ and His righteousness bestowed upon them through the justice delivered on the cross. We read of God in Acts, “For He has set a day when He will *judge the world with justice* by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Let us savor the words, “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Rev 22:12-13).

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

If everyone is going to stand before Jesus and He is able to make them stand because of faith, we should not be passing judgment on other believers. It is up to each of us to swallow pride and be decisive in our own minds to stop doing so. We must hold to the truth of the Gospel, but on secondary issues, we should be able to agree to disagree providing they are Scripturally based without taking Scripture out of context.

We should also be careful not to cause someone to sin by placing in front of him something that his conscience is not clear about. For example, if someone believes it is okay to have one beer in the privacy of their home, while another believes all drinking is wrong, then the one who has the beer should not drink it in front of the other person. If the body of Christ would behave in such ways described in these verses, can you imagine the peace and harmony there would be among the churches. It used to be this way in China. Christians were united on the Gospel until other churches in America began sending more than just Bibles over there. In addition to the much needed Word of God came doctrinal booklets and commentaries. The result was a divided body in China much like we have here.

Verse 14 makes it clear that Paul saw himself as one in the body of Christ. With the wisdom that came from Christ and His Word, Paul was convinced that no food was unclean in itself. The word used here for “unclean” is actually the word “common” in the Greek. This word is used nine times outside of this verse in Romans. In Acts it is used to indicate something normal or shared, “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44, see also Acts 4:32, Titus 1:4, Jude 3, Heb 10:29). In other cases it is used in *addition* to something unclean: “But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14, see also 10:28, 11:8, Mark 7:2)). It seems that the word really means to be the norm of society, but when used as “unclean” it refers to the what was considered normal among the Gentile world. It does not ever seem to fit the context solely of the unclean food mentioned in the Old Testament. Therefore, Paul didn’t state the obvious that Biblically described unclean food was clean, but rather all food was clean that God had stated was clean. The Gentiles ate much of the Biblically clean foods, but the Jews saw it as unclean according to their additional laws not stated by Moses. Some had been saying that all meat was unclean when this isn’t what the Bible said. Paul is saying all acceptable meat is clean in itself, however, if one man considers a beef steak unclean, than he shouldn’t eat it because it is unclean for him.

Because of the fact that clean meat can be unclean for some, it is best not to eat or drink things that cause other brothers in Christ to be bothered by. It doesn’t make it unclean, it is simply selflessly giving up something for the love of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Is your fleshly desire more important than the spiritual well-being of others? Paul said, “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall” (1 Cor 8:13). It is much better to give up something for yourself for the sake of others. If Christ died for them, surely we could abstain from some sort of food for them.

This brings another question to mind. If the Jews will not listen to us Gentiles preach the Gospel today, partly because we are so unclean in our practices, would we do better to not offend them in order to win them over to Christ? Something to think about.

Verse 16 almost seems to be a contradiction, but it isn’t. How can we choose not to eat something that someone else considers to be evil, yet not allow it to be spoken of as evil? Paul is saying, we don’t need to convert to their way of thinking, we simply need to be careful not to cause others to stumble because of our freedom. Don’t give any reason for someone else to speak evil of you. It would be better not to use your freedom than to damage your witness. We must deny ourselves for the benefit of our reputation and the

spreading of the Gospel. Likewise, on your end, don't allow what you think of as good to be a cause to speak evil of your brother because he does not see it as good.

The kingdom of God isn't about the do's and don'ts of food and drink, it is about the righteousness that comes from Christ and also the peace and joy that comes from this righteousness that was unearned on our part. Isaiah wrote, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever" (Isa 32:17). This is what the kingdom of God is all about. Paul says, "But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor 8:7-8). Those that get caught up in the do's and don'ts are in danger of beating themselves up because they can't do all the do's and they can't not do all the don'ts. This is why Paul earlier states, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:24-25)! Isaiah warned of this attitude that many of the Jews fell into: "So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there--so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured" (Isa 28:13). May this not be with the body of Christ today. Eating or not eating doesn't make you righteous. It is the Holy Spirit's presence within you that grants these gifts. Anyone who serves Christ in loving submission to His Word, regardless of their understanding of it, is pleasing to God and should be accepted by the other believers in Christ.

Christianity can only be understood through the Gospel of Jesus. We read in Hebrews of the Day of Atonement, "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. *They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-external regulations applying until the time of the new order*" (Heb 9:8-10). If one chooses to practice many of these external regulations of the old order of Aaron, *but do so for Christ*, we should accept them. (Keep in mind this verse in Hebrews is talking about ceremonial and Levitical practices, whereas clean and unclean meat was not just an "old order" command but was also in the order of Melchizedek, Noah, Adam, Abraham and the New Testament Church. The rules Paul is speaking of here in Romans 14 are those that are discussed in Colossians, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!." These are all destined to perish with use, because they are *based on human commands and teachings*. [Note he is not talking about God's commands perishing but man's additions]. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col 2:21-23).

When you get to heaven God isn't going to ask, "Did you eat meat?" or "Did you not eat meat?" but rather, "Do you have the blood of Jesus covering your sins?" Christians are pure not because of the food they eat, but the Savior they follow: "To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him" (Titus 1:14-16).

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food

is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

If the kingdom of God is of righteousness, peace and joy, then we should do everything possible to chase after righteousness. I am not saying that we can earn righteousness because it comes from Christ, however, when we are righteous, we desire and seek to obey God. Obedience brings out the blessings of our salvation, part of which is peace mutual edification. Just imagine if all believers would practice majoring in Christ, not in the minor doctrinal differences. This one focus would bring more peace and unity to the church than any other. I believe this is why Paul took an entire chapter to outline this topic.

Verse 20 warns us not to destroy the work of God. The context seems to be the work of building up the saved Church. We are told in Ephesians, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). In other words, don’t let food destroy the holy man you were created to be. Don’t let food cause others to stumble or divide the body of Christ.

This verse gives a final reminder that we have the right to eat all food created by God but should we? The next verse seems to give an answer of No. Again, I believe Paul is talking about the obvious food not determined as unclean in the Old Testament. He is saying everything God has made outside of the “unclean” category is clean. To say otherwise would indicate God’s Word changed or was a lie from the days of Adam and Noah. It is very similar to when Paul states, “Everything is permissible-but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible-but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor 10:23-24). The context is the same in that we should be watching out for others over our own desires. Certainly Paul wasn’t saying that “everything” which was permissible would include breaking God’s commandments. Likewise the “all food” doesn’t include the ones clearly not allowed. This may be why the word used here for “clean” is *kathara* in Greek and is most often translated as pure. In either case it is understood, however, that a man who would eat anything unclean is not damning his soul to hell because God has made us pure by His blood. These aren’t instructions of salvation, these are instructions to the saved to keep the focus on Christ for the kingdom of God is not dependent upon food!

If we are not careful about the food we eat, it is very possible we could be causing others to stumble so it is best to deny our freedoms for the sake of others. I can’t tell you how many times practicing homosexuals have thrown this back as support for homosexuality. How? They say that God has repealed His earlier Word on food, so likewise, the verses in Leviticus that discuss homosexuality are no longer in effect either. This is why it is better that one deny himself food or drink if someone might be offended by your freedom or apply that freedom to other sins.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

This chapter closes with a final command to keep whatever you believe about these things between you and God. It should be a very private manner of worship. If you believe it is okay to eat meat than eat it without trying to push your belief on others that don't eat meat. Likewise, if your conscience is pricked because of eating meat, then don't eat it but don't tell others not to eat it either. The man who lives within the freedom of Christ can have a clear conscience and need not feel guilty by what he approves. If he does feel guilty he is guilty because he is not eating in full faith but with doubt. The point is that if you think anything may be wrong and you do it anyway, in the depth of your heart you are disobeying regardless of what God thinks about it. Therefore, search out these matters and decide what you see the Bible, not traditions or society, saying. When you come to your conclusion, live it out with thankfulness and don't impose it upon others, nor look down on those whose freedom has led them to the opposite decision. "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. And this is His command: to believe in the Name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. Those who obey His commands live in Him, and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us: We know it by the Spirit He gave us" (1 John 3:21-24).

Once more I must add that the "whatever you believe" does not include things that are sinful. There are many examples of those who persecuted the early church fully believing they were pleasing God (Acts 3:17, 1 Cor 2:8, John 16:2), yet were condemned by God (Luke 11:50-51, Acts 2:23, 37). Paul is here referring to those things which are not clearly stated in the Bible and that have become traditions of men.

Romans 15

15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 15 begins referring back to the beginning of chapter 14 where it spoke of those who were strong in the faith. Those who have a free conscience about their food, drink or any part of their lives are to be patient with those who don't. There really is no reason to attack a brother in Christ for not eating any kind of meat because he is accepted by God, therefore, speaking up good only be motivated by pride and thinking you have the corner on truth. We are not here to please ourselves, but to please others as we build them up in the Lord and watch God cause them to grow in their faith. We have one purpose, to share God's love, not to change people's hearts. God does that: "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded

according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3:7-9).

We are to follow the example Christ gave us. He didn't please Himself, but was always serving others as He is to this day. Jesus even said, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt 16:24). Also, "By Myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, for I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). We are to love other and love is "not self seeking" (1 Cor 13:5, see also 1 Cor 10:24, Phil 2:4).

Psalms 69:9 is quoted here in reference to insults and is clearly indicated to be a prophecy of Christ's life as well (John 2:17). We read of Jesus' suffering, "When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:23-24). What an incredible example of insults falling upon Him instead of us. When people insult us, He takes it personally and will defend us so that we do not have to. If people get angry with us over our freedom, we need not fight back, but simply allow God to do His work. Anyone who has insulted the Lord's anointed will have consequences later. For now we are to remember Romans 12:20 where we are told to love even our enemies for in so doing we are heaping burning coals upon their heads. However, there is another meaning here as well. Jesus prayed for those who insulted Him that they might be forgiven. Therefore, this isn't just a matter of judgment upon those who insult us, but a matter of forgiveness for the offender. The sins of their insults were laid upon Jesus on the cross so that they may be forgiven. Therefore, don't judge those who insult you because God is able to make them stand beside you. Their insults have been laid upon Him. Praise be to God!

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" If Christ chose to not use His omnipotent power and allowed Himself to be crucified because of His love for you, we should be able to overlook the weaknesses of our brothers" (Phil 2:5-8). Even when the Lord returns He will have the same attitude of loving service: "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when He comes. I tell you the truth, He will dress Himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready" (Luke 12:37-38). This attitude of Christ is very humbling isn't it? Jesus came only to do God's will and we should only do the will of Christ. It is written of the Messiah, "Here I am, I have come--it is written about Me in the scroll. I desire to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within My heart" (Ps 40:7-8, see also John 6:38, Luke 22:42). Jesus didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it and place it in our hearts. The law is not our motivation, the love of Christ in our hearts is.

Verse 4 continues to explain that all of the Scriptures of old were written for our benefit. There was certainly more history that could have been recorded, but the purpose was to lead us to Christ so that we might benefit from His example of living for God. It wasn't an easy life for Jesus. He had to endure many trials and tribulations, yet He did so with joy: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the

joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb 12:2-3). It is in Christ and His strength that we endure and have our hope. It is even through the “Word” of God in the Old Testament that we see every single promise of God being faithfully fulfilled. It is through this same Word that we will overcome Satan and endure in the troubles ahead as well: “For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Rev 12:10-11).

Verse 5 connects our Godly gifts of endurance and encouragement to unity with the body of Christ. It is God who strengthens us by His Spirit and it is that same Spirit that promotes unity and should keep us from looking down on one another because we see the Scriptures differently. Don’t get me wrong, not everyone in the church has this Spirit within them, it is only those who “follow Christ” who have this unifying Spirit. There are many who go to church for reasons other than Christ.

Verse 6 gives the ultimate goal of this unity: To give God glory! Unity isn’t just for our benefit that we may live more peacefully and have fewer troubles on earth. The early church in Acts was united but still had plenty of trials. Unity indeed produces some peace and benefit for ourselves, however this should not be the motivating factor. If we are seeking unity for our own good, our eyes are not fixed on Jesus, but our own selfish gain. This isn’t serving others, but rather ourselves. The goal of unity is for Christ’s sake. In the Church being unified, we can with one heart and mouth glorify God. It is for God’s glory that we should serve others. When our motivation is for God’s glory, we benefit from that glory as well. “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will *share in the glory to be revealed*” (1 Peter 5:1). This unity and glory was the ultimate prayer Jesus had for believers that would follow Him: “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth. As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. *For them* I sanctify Myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. *I have given them the glory that You gave Me*, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to *complete unity* to let the world know that you sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me” (John 17:17-23). Even in God’s glory, Christ is serving us for He sanctified Himself on that cross for us. Let’s go have the same attitude Christ had and be sanctified for others. Paul had it. He said, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:19-23).

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." 10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." 12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The ultimate goal of unity is the focus of these verses as well. God is dedicating a large portion of Scripture to this means, yet how much effort do we put into striving for this end. Verse seven tells us to accept one another, whether your faith be weak or strong, faith is all it takes for you have been saved by grace through faith. Christ has accepted you for God's glory, and you are receiving the benefit of salvation. God is praised by those who have faith in Jesus. The only person worthy of any praise is God because in Christ's coming we see that all others have fallen short of the glory of God.

As we discussed at the beginning of this commentary, verse 8 shows us that Christ came for the Jews. He came to serve, die and save the lost sheep of Israel on behalf of God's truth. God made a covenant with the Jews and Jesus was coming to be faithful to that truth (Heb 2:16). Where does this leave the Gentiles? Verse 9 answers that question. The Gentiles also bring glory to God. Keep in mind throughout this discussion the points discussed at the beginning of this commentary. Many Gentiles are Jews. They were the lost sheep of Israel. By offering the covenant graces to the Gentiles God was reaching out to those lost sheep so that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). Ephraim became a multitude of Gentiles or *goyim*. (Gen 48:19). Other Gentiles were of non-Jewish origins, however, they too were received by Christ. With Jesus confirming the covenant promises all Gentiles could (not would) glorify God for His mercy shown to the Jew. This great love caused many to seek Him. This is the point discussed in Romans 11 and prophesied about in the Old Testament. It should have been no surprise that the Gentiles would be part of the Kingdom of God for it was written that God would be praised among the Gentiles with hymns of rejoicing. Psalm 18:49 is quoted where David says that he would praise God among the pagan nations around him. It is quoted here in Romans to show that the Jews would praise God among the pagan Gentile nations when they no longer were pagan because God offered them mercy.

We must also remember that in offering grace to the Gentiles, this was actually fulfilling His covenant promises, "And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed'" (Acts 3:24-26). It was through the Jew that the Gentile was blessed. Christ came on behalf of this truth.

Verse 10 gives further Old Testament proof that the Gentiles would be accepted by God. This is a quote from Deuteronomy 32:43 where God calls on the Gentiles to praise Him for delivering the Jews. Why? Salvation for the Gentile depended upon the Jewish line being preserved. Remember, in the covenant promise God said He would bless those who blessed Israel and He would curse those who cursed Israel. Therefore, in

praising God for His mercy to Israel, they were blessing Israel and thinking fondly of them. Those that did so would be blessed themselves according to the promise. From this we see that God was already calling the Gentile to be beneficiaries of His blessings. The Gentiles were to rejoice with God's people and this truth has not changed today. This verse also classifies the Gentiles as separate from God's people, which they weren't as Hosea told us, "I will say to those called 'Not My people,' 'You are My people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hos 2:23). I would say this is good cause for rejoicing.

Verse eleven quotes Psalm 117:1 where the context was simply a call to praise God for His love given to the Jews. It gives the same message of the earlier quotations saying that the Gentiles should praise God for His mercy to the Jew, because through their praises, they too would be blessed.

Verse 12 quotes Isaiah 11:1,10 as well. When a tree is cut down and appears to be dead, there is a shoot that comes from the roots. The Root of Jesse was David and from David came Jesus. David was a Christ-figure who ruled the nations and was a shepherd of God's people. He foreshadowed the real Root to come that would be so much better. There can be no question of this interpretation because Jesus tell us this: "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (Rev 22:16), and, "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed'" (Rev 5:4-5).

Jesus will rule all nations, both of the material and spiritual worlds. It was prophesied of Him that, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious" (Isa 11:10). The Gentiles would flock to and place their hope in Him. In order to place your hope in someone means you must realize you need help to begin with. In other words, the Gentiles would see their great sin and repent as they would look to Jesus to receive what the Jews were given.

Verse 13 closes this section by a prayer of blessing, asking that the God who does not disappoint hope would fill you with joy and peace that can come only from trusting the Lord. We read, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, *who through faith* are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-6). Trusting is believing even when situations around you seem hopeless, faith gives you comfort and peace to stand. Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego had this hope and peace as they were taken to the fiery furnace. Paul is saying may this joyful peace that comes from the Holy Spirit given to those of the covenant, fill and overcome you as well. I believe this phrase was intended for the Gentile objects of this hope, however, it also applied to the Jews who already had this hope. Again, this is the point of Romans 10 and 11. In any case, Paul has just given a number of proof verses showing that the Gentiles would be blessed because of God's blessing the Jew.

14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. 15 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because

of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In preparation of closing his letter, Paul writes encouraging words to build his brothers up. He has given them rebukes but this was part of applying his wisdom and knowledge to them. Paul was convinced that the Roman Christians were filled with goodness, that is from the Spirit of God, not from within themselves. It is the Spirit that grants knowledge and wisdom to use that knowledge to build up and instruct others. The Spirit is discerning and can distinguish between good and bad, truth and lies. We read in Proverbs, “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly” (Prov 15:14), and, “The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning” (Prov 14:6).

They were capable of “instructing” others. This isn’t talking about general school knowledge, but the rebuking and correcting through the Word of Truth. What Paul was saying is very similar to what he said in Timothy, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Tim 4:2-5). As competent ministers of the Gospel we must all be willing to lovingly correct and instruct others in truth. If we simply allow others to stray from truth and not correct them and be willing to endure hardship, we are not exercising our priestly duty.

As these brothers were instructing and loving rebuking one another, Paul had written many times to instruct them because of God’s grace and wisdom planted in himself. In fact, Paul was chosen to minister to the Gentiles about the knowledge of the Gospel of God through Jesus, the Christ.

There is a wonderful imagery here of the priesthood. In the Old Testament priests would offer sacrifices on behalf of others. Jewish tradition tells us that when someone had sinned they could bring an offering to the Tabernacle to be sacrificed. The priest would take the animal and make the sacrifice for that person. As the smoke rose up from the burning sacrifice, if the smoke went over above the Most Holy Place, it was a sign that God had accepted the sacrifice and they were forgiven. Here, Paul is said to fulfill his priestly duty of sharing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Earlier we read in Romans that we were to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). The Gentiles were to offer themselves as an acceptable offering which was one without blemish. How can any man do so? Only by being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and made new in Christ Jesus. This was the Gospel and knowledge that Paul was instructing the Gentiles about. There was no need for the smoke to pass over the Tabernacle because the Spirit made them “full of goodness” and God has accepted them as “competent,” “complete,” and “sanctified” through Jesus. As Paul was a minister or servant of Christ, we too, are to have the same servant attitude as called by Jesus. It is as John wrote, “With Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them

to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10).

One final aspect of Paul fulfilling his priestly duty is seen in the connections between the Jew and Gentile. Remember, Christ came for the Jew to fulfill His promises to them, however, part of that promise was that all nations would be blessed through the Jew. Paul was chosen to bring the Gospel to the Gentile people so this was his duty as prophesied. Speaking of Gentiles as offerings to God Isaiah writes, “‘They will proclaim my glory among the nations and they will bring all your brothers, from *all the nations*, to My holy mountain in Jerusalem *as an offering to the LORD*--on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,’ says the LORD. ‘They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels. And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,’ says the LORD” (Isa 66:20-21). Praise be to God for His wonderful plan of salvation for all men.

17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done- 19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. 21 Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

Paul was thankful and praised God for his opportunity to serve God in sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles. This was Paul’s mission as a priest (v.16) to serve the Gentiles in matters that were concerning God. This priestly attitude is explained in Hebrews: “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest” (Heb 5:1-5). Paul would not take any credit of bringing the Gentiles to faith, but would only brag on what Christ had done using him as an instrument to perform this great miracle of conversion. Paul didn’t lead the Gentiles to obedience, Christ did using Paul’s words and actions as tools. “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Phil 2:13). Also, as we read in the Psalms, “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to Your Name be the glory, because of Your love and faithfulness” (Ps 115:1).

Verse 19 lists some of Christ’s work through Paul. The Spirit within Paul allowed him to perform signs and miracles as evidence of the truth of the Gospel. We can read of some of these miracles in Acts 2:43 and 19:11-12. This is exactly what God did through Moses to proclaim the glory of God in the Old Testament as well. Some may think this power of miracles and signs no longer exists, however, there is no Biblical indication so suggest God still doesn’t work in this way. The power of the Holy Spirit that lives inside of us has already demonstrated miraculous power in the lives of many Christians

throughout the world. There are people being healed, delivered, strengthened and gifted right up to this very hour.

Paul had traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum to fully proclaim the Gospel, although Jerusalem was not his starting point (Gal 1:17-18), it was the center from which the Gospel came. Illyricum was the province northwest of Macedonia and was in the area of Dalmatia, to which Titus went (2 Tim 4:10). The point given here is that the Gospel was preached by Paul from the center of Jerusalem to the far reaches of the earth at that time to share the great message of salvation to people who had not heard of Christ's coming. Paul had the attitude that we should have today. Rather than simply practice the "sheep stealing" that goes on in so many denominations today as people bounce from one church to another, we should desire to preach Jesus to the far ends of the earth and make sure the message spreads to those who have not had the opportunity to hear this saving knowledge of salvation.

Verse 21 shows that Paul was simply fulfilling what was written in Isaiah 52:15 that the Gentile world that had been so far removed from God, their own Creator, would have opportunity to see, hear and understand. If the desire of every believer would follow Paul's example, there should not be a person on earth that would be able to say, "I didn't know."

22 This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, 24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. 28 So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

Verse 22 is connected to the previous verses which tells us that the reason Paul was hindered from coming to the Romans Gentiles was that others were preaching the Gospel there. Paul's desire was not to build on another person's foundation, but to go where the Gospel had not yet reached.

Verse 23 shows that Paul had covered the entire area that was previously untouched by the message of Christ and he was now open and free to go to Rome. It wasn't that he didn't want to go there before, it is just that he found it more important for the Kingdom of God to go other places first. He put his own desires aside for the benefit of his purpose and calling.

Paul was planning on going to Spain to further preach the Gospel and would stop at Rome on his way. He warned them that he would also have them assist him in this journey to Spain. Probably with financial, moral and prayer support. It was a common practice in many cases for churches to even send along a delegate from their fellowship to accompany the main missionary. In many cases church members would accompany

Paul to the outer limits of the city (Acts 15:3; 17:14-15; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Cor 16:6,11; 3 John 8). Whatever this assistance would be we are not told, and at least in what the Scriptures record, his journey may not even have taken place. However, before going to Spain Paul was *planning* on staying in Rome for awhile to enjoy the sweet fellowship of other believers.

Verse 25 tells us that though Paul intended to go to Spain, before he could do so he must go to Jerusalem first to serve them in their needs and take an offering to them. Interestingly, Rome was not his priority but rather to spread the Gospel in Spain. Rome would only be a stop on the way if Paul's plans would develop. It is also refreshing to see that Rome was not the focus of the side trip, but the brothers and sisters in Christ that were at Rome is what Paul desired to see. He longed to have the sweet fellowship of other believers but was still focused on planting seeds to the ungodly. Sometimes we in the churches today can get too focused on fellowship and serving ourselves that we forget on neglect outreach and missions. Clearly Paul wasn't suffering from this sin.

The Gentiles of Macedonia and Achaia had given money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Macedonia was a country in Greece east of the Aegean Sea. Paul had planted a church in the capital of Philippi and also in the town of Thessalonica of Macedonia. Achaia is most often referred to as the entire western region of ancient Greece.

Again we must note that the collection wasn't taken up for everyone, but was focused on the needs of the Church body. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out the believers only asked of them to, "Continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10). Paul certainly was eager to do so and the Macedonian and Achaian churches were also eager and willing to give as well. This is the attitude we should have as believers. It should be a joy to give and we should not need to be asked or have a plate passed in front of our faces, but our hearts should be motivated and eager to give. The blessing of the Macedonian church is recorded in Scripture, "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (2 Cor 8:1-5, See also 2 Cor 9:2). Oh that the same praise might be said of us today.

Verse 27 reflects the attitude we in the church should have towards the Jews today, especially those who have believed on the Name of Jesus. The Gentiles "owed" it to the Jews because they had received a promise that was not given to them, but to the Jew back when the covenant was given to Abraham. It was through the Jew that "all nations" would be blessed. Because God would bless those who blessed Israel and curse those who did not bless Israel, in providing for the Jewish saints in Jerusalem, the Gentiles were being blessed by God. Isn't it wonderful, that even in the obligations of a Christian there are so many blessings that we should be pleased to be obligated.

For the same reason the Gentiles should support the Jewish believers, the church today is to support their missionaries and pastors, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more" (1 Cor 9:10-12)? Those who are

sharing spiritual blessings should be on the receiving end of the material blessings. It is for this reason that the Levites were given a share of the offerings and of the land of Israel. We read in Timothy, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17-18). The word translated “honor” is *timees* and is a word often used for money paid. In other words, a pastor or teacher should be well taken care of.

Verse 28 shows Paul’s clear plan. Once Paul had delivered the money safely to Jerusalem he would head off to Spain and visit the saints in Rome. He fully anticipated that when he arrived in Rome the full measure and blessing of the Spirit would accompany him and that his arrival would be only by God’s gracious blessings. In other words, if it be God’s will he would arrive safely in Rome soon. Paul understood that, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (Prov 16:9), and “I know, O LORD, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). We do not know if Paul ever made it to Spain but we know he made it to Rome because his imprisonment took him there in the end chapters of Acts. Paul had plans but God was directing his steps.

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, 32 so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. 33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

This chapter closes with Paul urging the saints in Rome to join him in supporting his mission through prayer. The motive not being guilt or love for Paul, but love for Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 31 lists the prayer needs. Paul had been under constant attack by Judaizers as well as unbelieving Gentiles throughout his life as a Christian. However, as Paul was going to take the gift to Jerusalem, who knew that this would be one of the greatest attacks yet. Paul used to be respected in Jerusalem, but now he was viewed as a traitor to many of the Jews there. He wasn’t worried about his reputation, however, his reputation could cause him to be killed.

The second thing Paul wanted prayer for was for the godly people to accept his message and service as well. Why wouldn’t they want to accept his gift and service? There are three main reasons. First, because Paul was a preacher to the Gentiles, there were many rumors going on about him. We see this when he arrives in Jerusalem his companions tell him, “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. . . . Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law (Acts 21:20-24).

Secondly, it is possible that some Jews might have a problem accepting money that had come from the Gentile church. As we see in Acts 15, some were struggling with the idea that God has opened up their promise to the Gentiles.

The third reason Paul needed to pray for his service to be accepted is that there very well could have still been some believers who questioned Paul's motives since he was a persecutor of the church years earlier. It is sometimes easier to forgive than to forget. Part of Paul's testimony is given in Galatians:

“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles-only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.’ And they praised God because of me” (Gal 1:13-24)

Paul was praying that the saints in Jerusalem might see that God had done a miracle of conversion in his life and praise God because of him, however, we could learn a good lesson from Paul's concern that this would not happen. There are many lost sinners who have become found saints through Jesus Christ. Many of them have pasts that involved drugs, prison and pornography. Do we ever truly accept their service to God and the church today? Do you suppose that they pray that the saints would accept their service as Paul did?

It would only be God's will, not Paul's plan, that he would be able to go to Rome being filled with joy over the results in Jerusalem. He prayed that all would go well so that when he went to Rome he might be refreshed with the fellowship of the saints there.

The close of this chapter simply is a prayer of Paul that God would be with them. However, in this prayer he gives a subtle reminder that God is a God of peace and, therefore, His people should be united peacefully. We read of our Creator, “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33). Paul wanted the God of peace to give peace to all of them. This has been one of the themes of the last two chapters. Paul had seen plenty of dissention and quarrelling and he knew what a blessing peace was for the church and how it was further evidence of the Holy Spirit working within them. Peace can only come from God through Jesus Christ who works love and forgiveness in our lives and empowers us to share this with others. So may the God of peace be with you all.

Romans 16

16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many

people, including me. 3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

The book of Romans concludes with a long list of names. At first this may seem a little unnecessary and boring, however, this list is very telling and should be an encouragement to you and I. The very fact that saints are individually recognized shows Paul's love for these people and the importance of each body part within the Church. Jesus calls us by name and will even give you a new name in heaven that only you and He knows: "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it" (Rev 2:17). Sometimes it is easy to feel like a piece of sand on a beach without any distinction or individuality, yet these names show us that God does not see us as just another piece of sand, but He sees us as unique and important parts of His kingdom. You are not just a number to God or to the saints of God.

This epistle was probably written in Corinth and Phoebe is either delivering the letter to the Roman Church or is accompanying those that are. The latter is more likely since Phoebe is a woman and wouldn't travel alone. She is called a sister in Christ and also a servant. The Greek work is actually deaconess. Therefore, she was very involved in her church back in Cenchrea, a seaport of Corinth.

Deaconesses were women who most often taught other women in the church as we see in Titus where men were instructed to, "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the Word of God" (Titus 2:3-5). Historically we find evidence of deaconesses in a letter from Pliny to a man named Trajan where he was giving advice on how to obtain information from the Christians, "I deemed it necessary to put two maidservants who are called 'ministrae' (that is 'deaconesses') to the torture, in order to ascertain what is the truth." Biblically these women were not to teach men, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:11-12), and "As in all the

congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (1 Cor 14:33-35).

Paul asks for the Christians in Rome to receive Phoebe with special thankfulness due to her great service and help that she had been to so many others, including himself. Most likely she was a true servant of Christ that helped the sick and took care of any of the earthly needs of Paul and others. Probably a prayer warrior and an encourager as well.

Verses 3-4 speak of Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who had accompanied Paul. Paul first met them in Corinth after they had fled from Italy when Claudius ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. They were tentmakers like Paul so they worked together (Acts 18:2-3). It was this couple who took in Apollos in Ephesus and explained the Gospel more clearly to him (Acts 18:26). They had a church that met in their house (1 Cor 16:19). It seemed that when Claudius died or the expulsion was revoked they apparently went back to Rome and Paul was sending his greetings to his dear friends. We do not know when it was, if not multiple occasions, that Priscilla and Aquila had risked their own lives to protect Paul. Not only that but they were also dangerously offer their lives for all the Gentile churches. As we saw them with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus, and now in Rome, they were obviously very busy within the church, spreading the Gospel which was not received warmly by many of the Jews within these areas. Certainly, their very lives were laid on the line simply by protecting and being associated with Paul.

Verse 5 is given to greet the Church within the house of Priscilla and Aquila. Just as they had a home church in Corinth, they now had one in Rome as well. No matter where we live or what our occupation, our primary goal must be to be busy in the Lord as this faithful couple was.

Epenetus had a special place in Paul’s heart because he was the first to be converted to Christ in the entire province of Asia. Today, many people join the church for social reasons or some sort of selfish ambition. Though we really know nothing of this man but what is listed here, one thing is for sure, Epenetus followed Christ when it was anything but popular to do so and it was not for selfish ambition. He knew the Truth and that Truth set him free.

Verse 6 names an unknown Mary whose work in the Lord was appreciated.

Verse 7 mentions Andronicus and Junias who were related to Paul in some way. It is possible that they were simply Jews as Paul calls all the Jews his relatives or kinsmen in Romans 9:3. Since he is writing to the Gentile church here, it would be worth distinguishing them from the others but it is possible that they were related physically somehow as well. In any case, they had been imprisoned with Paul as many other Christians had been during this time. Paul commends them in that they had believed before he had and were either well known among all the apostles or were considered to be two of the more fruitful of the apostles. These were not one of the original 12 disciples, but were merely ones who had been “sent out” by the Church and God to spread the Gospel. The many years of their faithful service has shown that they were true converts of Christ.

Verses 8-11 speak of Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodion and Narcissus. All of these people were loved by Paul and worthy of mentioning. Though we know nothing of them but what is said here, God found it

important to list them in His inspired Word. Apelles was tested and approved, suggesting he went through many trials and never compromised the Gospel throughout it all.

Aristobulus apparently had a full household of believers, a true blessing in Christ that so few have today. I can only pray that God would bring each of my children and family to know and follow the Lord. Herodion was another “relative” that could either be related to Paul or just Jewish.

Verse 12 lists three women, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis and he mentions their hard work for Christ. There are those who casually play the role of Christianity and then there are those like these women who work diligently and with self sacrifice for the Lord. Today, there are many who say that Paul had a poor view of women and use this as an excuse to reinterpret the verses speaking of women being silent in the churches. The very fact that Paul mentions these women and others with such gratitude and praise shows there is no truth in that at all.

In verse 13 Rufus and his mother are mentioned with family fondness. This mother was like a mother to Paul. In Christ, there are many who are not blood relatives but are like mothers, fathers and siblings to me. Christ is the tie that bonds people together. It is Christ that will keep a family close and it is Christ who set this example for us: “When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26-27). Jesus also said, “‘Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?’ Pointing to His disciples, He said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’” (Matt 12:48-50). In Christianity there is no one who should be without father, mother, brother or sister.

Verses 14-15 mentions Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Hermas, Olympas and the group of believers with them. Obviously there were too many to mention, yet again though we know nothing of these people, God saw it important to have them listed here. No doubt when we meet these people in heaven we will know who they are.

Verse 16 closes this list of people with instruction to get along and to greet one another with a holy kiss, that is with genuine affection and brotherly love. The practice of a kiss is common in eastern nations, although often times it is not with holiness, but rather heartless tradition much like our handshake can be today. In today’s western language I would think Paul is saying, “Don’t be so uptight give one another a hug when you see them and let them know they are loved and appreciated.”

It is not only Paul that wished these greetings upon the Roman Church, but all the churches. This is the attitude we should have today. We should be concerned about the other churches in our community, state, nation and world. Instead, it seems that each particular church and denomination is only concerned about themselves. This last verse should be a rebuke to all those who have that attitude.

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. 19 Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want

you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

As Paul finished encouraging the believers in Rome he used that as a springboard to warn them about divisions within the body. We need to “watch out” and be on our guard against any root of bitterness or anything else that could start quarreling and dissention, but especially “those” who cause these things to take place. Division is an obstacle to spiritual progress and goes against the Word of God. I believe this is one of the biggest reasons the Church is not growing today, because every denomination feels they have their corner on the truth. Rather than being united in Christ, we are divided on doctrine.

With this said, we must realize that the problem is with these people, not the doctrine itself. There are many churches whose doctrine is not Biblical and we should be divided from them. So where is the balance here? Paul is warning us not to allow it to get to that point to begin with. When we allow people to lead in the Church who do not fit the Timothy requirements we allow false doctrine to creep in. We need to practice church discipline more often and at times, excommunicate people from the church. Discrimination? Yes, but Biblically mandated! For further warning and instruction on this matter, consider the following verses:

- “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 3-4).
- “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:17-20).
- “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute” (2 Peter 2:1-3).
- “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Tim 6:3-5).
- “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:3-5).

- “Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. [This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves” (Gal 2:3-4).
- “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Cor 11:13-15).
- “I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false” (Rev 2:2-3).
- “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1-2).
- “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10-11).
- “But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’” (1 Cor 5:10-13).

We are to keep away from such people and to “expel” them from our midst. This will help keep unity within the church. While the world may look at this as hypocritical or unforgiving, it is what the Bible commands us to do. We are to judge those within the church. It is our God given responsibility to practice such church discipline, yet because we have not done so, look at the church today.

Verse 18 explains what the motives of these people are. They serve their own flesh to receive gain themselves. Do not be naïve if someone flatters you or speaks with fancy and clever speech. Instead, always filter what is said through the Word of God and do not dismiss others because they are not as fine-tuned as others may be. Remember, Jesus chose those of low social status to follow Him as His disciples. Paul was an exception. Today, there are many out there who can speak well and keep you on the edge of the pew, but their words are empty and in some case, false. Churches continue to grow in size and money is spent almost entirely on themselves. Look at the mission mindedness of a church in their budget, and this will say a lot. It may not mean they are false teachers, but it may reflect an attitude that needs adjusting.

Verse 19 shows that even good people who are being obedient to the faith can be naïve to the evils around them. Paul is glad to commend them on their obedience, but warns them to be wise about the teachings and practices around them. It is the same advice Jesus gave, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16).

One of the best ways to be wise to good is to stay as far from evil as possible. People have often told me that they feared I was going to be too strict with my children and that I would isolate them. I always took this as a compliment. I can choose to isolate

my children from dirty words, humanism, evolution, flattery, bad characters and coarse jokes or I can isolate them from prayer, Truth, creation, love, Christian fellowship, and Christ-centered fellowship. We all isolate our kids, it is just what we choose to isolate them from. If you think about it, the closest we can be to the Garden of Eden in this fallen world is to be naïve to evil. In the Garden, a large part of the paradise was not knowing evil. When they ate of the tree of knowledge, they knew evil. Oh what I would give to be completely innocent about what is evil! We don't draw a line to separate good from evil and then see how close we can get to this line. We draw the line and see how far we can stay away from it. This is the best way to be innocent about what is evil. Do not even allow your thoughts to take you down a road that could lead to sin. Do not even allow your eyes to see anything that could cause your mind to stumble. Do not even allow your ears to hear something that causes your eyes to turn. Do not even allow your mouth to utter words that will cause your conscience to be defiled. Do not even allow your feet to walk where your flesh will fall. Do not even allow your hands to touch what your arms should not embrace. As Paul says in Corinthians, "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults" (1 Cor 14:20-21).

That may be good advice about staying away from evil, however, keeping clear of sin doesn't make you wise to the good. How do we "think like adults?" One must also draw near to the Word. Read it, study it, memorize it, meditate upon it. In so doing you will become wise to the good. We read in Timothy how, "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). It isn't enough to just stay away from evil, we need to run towards God as we are fleeing from evil, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5-6). Paul's desire was that, "in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments" (Col 2:2-4).

Verse 20 calls God the God of peace. A wonderful reminder when speaking about unity within the Church. It also reminds us that as we continue to live in the wisdom and grace of Christ Jesus, God is active and Satan will soon be crushed under "your" feet through the work of God. This is a clear reference to Genesis 3:15 and Christ's work on the cross on our behalf. Yet with so much evil all around it could easily be too discouraging and one would give up. It isn't too hard for us to resist the devil because God has empowered us to do so. "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). As James said, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you" (James 4:7-8). We resist the evil and Satan will flee. We come near to God and He comes near to us to pour out His powerful grace through Jesus Christ in, on, and throughout our lives. Now that is a promise we can stand on! It is this promise that makes God the God of peace. We do not need to fear because God will crush Satan for us. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Also, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests" (Luke 2:14). With God's favor we have peace and for that we should praise His Name!

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. 22 I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

Timothy was with Paul when writing this letter as were some of Paul's relatives like Lucius, Jason and Sosipater. Timothy has spent many years with Paul. He lived in Lystra (Acts 16:1), and was actively preaching the Word along with Paul (2 Cor 1:19, 1 Thess 3:2) despite being very young (1 Tim 4:12), and was almost killed for doing so (Phil 2:29). We know he spent time in prison for preaching the Word (Heb 13:23) and that Paul wrote two epistles to Timothy (1 Tim 1:2).

Lucius, Jason and Sosipater were probably Jews. If Paul is speaking of literal relatives rather than Jewish brothers of his, they would still be Jews since Paul was a Jew. Lucius was a native of Cyrene and a prophet in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). If Jason was a Jew, it is interesting that his parents must have been Hellenized because many Jews had taken upon Greek names before the Macabbean revolt around 164 BC. Jason was the Greek name for Joshua. Regardless, Jason obviously was not Hellenized himself and Paul may have often stayed in his house (Acts 17:5). Sosipater may be the same one mentioned who accompanied Paul at Berea (Acts 20:4). Nothing more is known of him.

Also, as was often the case, other people wrote down letters for Paul and then Paul would sign them in his own handwriting (Col 4:18, 2 Thess 3:17, 1 Cor 16:21). In this case it was Tertius who was either transcribing for Paul or writing as it was dictated. Some think based on Galatians 6:11 that Paul's handwriting was not easy to read so he had others write for him.

Gaius had taken Paul and probably Timothy and Tertius into his home. Paul had perhaps baptized this Gaius (1 Cor 1:14) in Corinth. If it is the same man, he was so highly esteemed that John wrote an epistle to him (3 John). There was also a Gaius in Derbe (Acts 20:4). In any case, it was in Gaius's house where the church met to worship, pray and sharpen each other and was most likely a prominent and wealthy member of society. The last two people mentioned were Erastus, a high official that many may have heard of. He was a travel companion with Timothy when they went to Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and was left to minister in Corinth for a while as well (2 Tim 4:20). Many of the names listed in this section had traveled with Paul to one or many churches and their reputation probably had circulated throughout the Church, therefore, there is little doubt that the churches throughout the world had at least heard of these men. It would be an encouragement knowing that such names were praying and thinking of the Church in Rome.

Quartus, another brother in Christ that was obviously very involved with the Church but nothing else is known of him. All of these men were sending their greetings along with Paul.

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic

writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him- 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The book of Romans closes with this doxology. It is God who is able to establish and make firm ones position in the kingdom of heaven through the Gospel. As we read in Peter: “For you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). In Ephesians Paul writes, “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph 3:20-21). In Jude the same truth is plainly seen: “To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24-25). The clear truth is that we can be sure that by God’s power He will preserve us to the end and for this He deserves all praise and glory.

This Gospel was the revelation or revealing of a mystery that had been hidden since the beginning of time. Paul calls it “my gospel” here, not because he is the author of it, but because it was his relaying the same Truth as Jesus prayed, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one” (John 17:20-21). It was through the message of Paul preaching the Gospel that God was firmly establishing Gentiles into His covenant. It is now our Gospel to take and share with the world as well. Will you claim it to preach it?

As discussed earlier in this book, the word mystery with this association with the Gospel is almost always used in connection with the Gentiles being welcomed into the Jewish covenant. This is very appropriate for this epistle to the Gentiles in Rome. This mystery of the Gospel of Christ is recorded in the Old Testament prophecies and is now revealed and understood because God has commanded eyes and ears to be opened. The goal is so that ALL nations, Jews and Gentiles, might believe and obey Jesus.

Verse 27 closes by showing who gets the glory for this revelation of salvation. It is none other than our Creator God through Jesus Christ. Amen to that!