

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

* * * THE GOSPEL OF GOD * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.**"

Romans 1:16-17

AUTHOR: Paul (c. 57-58 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE/PLACE OF WRITING. The epistle to the Romans opens with the assertion that it is Paul the Apostle (Rom1:1) who is addressing all the "saints" in "Rome" (Rom1:7); that Paul was the author of Romans is the uniform testimony of the early church, including even the ancient heretics (e.g., Marcion). Paul used Tertius as his amanuensis in recording the words of this letter (Rom16:22). The letter was apparently written by Paul while he was in Corinth; it was carried from Corinth to Rome by Phoebe (Rom16:1-2), who was part of the church in Cenchreae (i.e., the eastern harbor of Corinth). The letter would have been written during Paul's 3 month stay in Corinth as part of his third missionary journey (Act20:2-3), either late winter or early spring of 57-58 AD.

AUDIENCE. The audience addressed by Paul in this epistle is "all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom1:7): that is, all the believers in Rome¹. The church at Rome is unique among the churches addressed by Paul in that it was not a church planted either directly or indirectly by him or any other apostle². It was likely started by Jews from Rome who were converted while visiting Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Act2:10).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. As capital of the Roman Empire, Rome was the greatest city in the world at the time Paul wrote this letter to the Christians residing there. An inscription found at Ostia Antica, the harbor city of ancient Rome (Rome itself was approximately 20 miles inland) indicates that at c. 14 AD, the city's population was 4.1

¹ Though we often speak of the church (singular) in Rome, it was almost certainly comprised of multiple assemblies throughout the city.

² Despite the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church that the Apostle Peter founded the church in Rome, there is no evidence to support this claim. If Peter were in Rome when Paul wrote this epistle, it is difficult to understand why Peter is never mentioned or addressed in the letter (not even in the section containing personal greetings to his acquaintances in Rome, comprising most of Romans 16, which is the most lengthy of any of his letters). Furthermore, Paul made it his personal policy to never "build upon another man's foundation" (Rom15:20), which would seem to be inconsistent with his desire to minister in Rome (Rom1:10-11) if Peter had founded and/or were present at the church in Rome.

million. Although the church in Rome was undoubtedly started by Jews, by the time Paul wrote this epistle the Jewish element was in the minority and the church was comprised primarily of Gentiles (Rom1:13); this trend may have been accelerated as a result of the Roman Emperor Claudius expelling all Jews from the city of Rome in 49 AD (Act18:2). There seems to be an undercurrent throughout the letter regarding the reconciliation/compatibility of Jewish and Gentile Christianity.



THEME OF ROMANS. The importance of the Book of Romans cannot be overstated. In the providence of God Romans appears first among the N.T. epistles, not only because it is the longest of Paul's epistles (the historical basis for the order of the epistles), but also because its subject matter deserves first place. In his epistle to the Galatians, written c. 51 AD (before Romans), the Apostle Paul **defends** the gospel of grace (Gal1:6-9; 2:16); in Romans, Paul **defines** the gospel of grace (Rom1:16). The oldest question recorded in the Bible, and the most important, was asked by Job, "How should man be just with God?" (Job9:2); Romans gives a clear answer to that ancient question, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom1:17; quoting Hab2:4). The theme throughout Romans is the grace of God in general, with justification by grace through faith emphasized in particular. Romans presents in exhaustive detail the theology that undergirds the gospel of grace, which allows God to save believing sinners without compromising His own righteousness (Rom3:26).

OUTLINE OF ROMANS. Paul's presentation in Romans is to first expound doctrinal truth (Rom1-11), followed by exhortation/application based upon that doctrine (Rom12-16). In Romans 1-3, Paul presents an exhaustive argument to establish the universal condemnation of all men before God, whether Gentile or Jew, and the absolute impossibility of salvation by (any) works. In Romans 3-8, Paul reveals and expounds salvation through faith in all its facets (justification, sanctification, and glorification), including the security of the

believer. Romans 9-11 is an appendix to the doctrinal section of the epistle. It presents an analysis of God's relationship with national Israel (past, present, and future) in order to answer an obvious question: if the nation of Israel was unconditionally chosen by God in the past, and God's calling is irrevocable, why is Israel rejected in the present (and what will be of it in the future)? This is an incredibly important question, not only for Jews but also for Gentiles, as it goes to the issue of the faithfulness of God in doing what He has unconditionally committed to do, fully, historically, and literally.

I. Introduction	Rom1:1-17
II. The Wrath of God Revealed (Condemnation)	Rom1:18-3:20
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A. Israel, Elected in the Past	Rom9:1-33
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HISTORICAL INFLUENCE OF ROMANS. Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley all ascribed their conversions to the Book of Romans. John Calvin said of Romans, "When anyone understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scriptures". In a similar vein, Donald Grey Barnhouse subtitled his four-volume commentary on Romans, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*.

The Book of Romans was singularly instrumental in the widespread recovery of the genuine (i.e., Biblical) gospel at the time of the Protestant Reformation, which freed an innumerable number from bondage to the false, pagan, **Roman** Catholic (so-called) Church. Unfortunately, it is a sad fact of our day that ignorance (or rejection) of the Biblical gospel, as exhaustively set forth in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, is leading to a widespread reunification of Christendom under the Pope and his harlot church in preparation for the Tribulation (Rev17). Case in point: Prominent Southern Baptist leaders Richard Land (then President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) and Larry Lewis (then President of the Home Mission Board) were signatories to the controversial 1994 *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* declaration. More recently, Southern Baptist superstar pastor Rick Warren, in an April 2014 interview on EWTN (a Roman Catholic cable television channel), referred to Pope Francis as "**our** new pope" and praised him for "doing everything right".

I. INTRODUCTION
(Romans 1:1-17)

CHAPTER 1

PAUL AND HIS PURPOSE IN WRITING TO THE ROMANS

- [1] Paul identifies himself using two titles. First, he describes himself as a "servant" (i.e., a bonds slave; Greek, **δοῦλος**) of Jesus Christ, one who out of love for his master (Jesus Christ) had voluntarily committed himself to serving Him forever (cf. Exod21:5-6). Second, he was "called to be an apostle" by Jesus Christ (Gall1:1; cf. Rom1:5). Note that Paul puts his title as "servant of Jesus Christ" before than of "apostle".

Paul describes his calling, or apostleship, as one of being "separated unto the gospel of God". Paul had been a Pharisee (Philip3:5). The Hebrew root from which the term, Pharisee, was derived means 'separated one'. However, whereas the Pharisee saw himself separated from a ritualistically unclean world, here Paul the Pharisee says he is "separated **unto** the gospel of God"; Paul's life was devoted to the proclamation of the "gospel" given by revelation from "God" (Col1:23).

- [2] A parenthesis elaborating on the "gospel of God" begins in verse 2 and goes through verse 4. A Jewish audience in particular would (rightly) evaluate the message of Paul according to its consistency with God's prior revelation, namely the O.T. (Isa8:20; Cp., Act17:11). For this reason it was important to stress that the "gospel of God" preached by Paul had been "promised afore by [God's] prophets in the holy scriptures". To support this assertion, Paul will directly quote from the O.T. at least 61 times in this letter, along with many additional allusions to O.T. history and type. Paul's argument in Romans 4 that Abraham was justified before God by his faith rather than his works is critical in this regard (Rom4:13-25).
- [3] The "gospel of God" concerns God's "Son" (Cp., Jn3:16), who is "Jesus Christ our Lord". In vv3-4, allusion is made to the two natures of Christ. The fact that Jesus "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" highlights His true humanity. The verbal used here, translated "was made", is from the Greek **γίνομαι** which means 'to become' or 'to come into existence'. Christ's human nature came into existence at a point of time in history, namely the incarnation (Luk1:31); as a man, Christ was a physical descendent of King "David" (Luk1:32).
- [4] In contrast to Christ's human nature, which "was made" (v3), His divine nature as "the Son³ of God" was "declared"; that is, the divine nature of Christ is eternal and had no beginning (Cp., Mic5:2). This declaration was made "with power", and its most potent manifestation was that of Christ's "resurrection from the

³ Throughout the N.T. the expression "the son of" is used as a Hebrew idiom, meaning 'having the same nature as' (cf. Mk3:17; Act4:36). That Jesus is said to be "the Son of God" is not a position of inferiority to God the Father, but an assertion of His equality (in divine essence) with His Father (cf. Jn10:30-33).

dead", which fulfilled Christ's greatest prophecy (Jn2:19-22) and was the final, indisputable sign confirming Jesus was the Messiah (Matt12:38-40).

Most commentators take the phrase "according to the spirit of holiness" in this verse to be merely a reference to the Holy Spirit's participation in the resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom8:11). The construction of the phrase is unique in Paul's writings, however, and almost certainly refers to something else. It could be a reference to the fact that the divine essence of the Son is "spirit", here alluded to as "the spirit of holiness", which He shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Jn4:24).

The Hypostatic Union. Perhaps the best, most concise (human) expression of the Biblical doctrine of the hypostatic union was formulated at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) in order to correct the erroneous teaching of Nestorius and Eutyches: "**Christ is undiminished Deity, united with true humanity, without confusion, in one person, forever.**" The important distinction asserted in this formulation is that the divine and human natures are united in the person Christ without confusion; that is, the divine and human natures, while coexisting in the Person of Christ, remain unmixed, so that the Creator-creature distinction is preserved even in the hypostatic union.

- [5] From the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, Paul received: 1) "grace", and 2) "apostleship". That Paul had received these gifts of God never ceased to amaze and humble him (cf. Eph3:8; 1Tim1:12-17). Paul received these gifts of God for a unique purpose in the divine plan, namely to herald "the faith"⁴ to "all nations" (Greek ἔθνος, having the meaning of Gentile nations or Gentiles, in contrast to Jews). Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Cp., Rom11:13; Gal2:7-8; 1Tim2:7; 2Tim1:11) and to take the revelation he received from God to them; that revelation includes the "gospel" (Rom1:15), but it is much more than the gospel (Matt28:19-20). Finally, this purpose of God in the life of Paul was "for His name", meaning for the glory of God⁵.

Note on the Qualifications for Apostleship. Considerable misunderstanding has surrounded discussions of the qualifications for apostleship, generally (wrongly) centered on the historical narrative in Acts where the Eleven chose a replacement for Judas based on the criteria of having been with them continuously beginning with the baptism of Jesus by John and having witnessed His resurrection and ascension (cf. Act1:21-22); if these are the qualifications for apostleship, Paul could not have been an apostle. However, the Acts 1 narrative is simply that, a descriptive (not prescriptive) account of an historical event. The sole Biblical qualification for apostleship was simply to have been personally called by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt10:1-2; 1Cor1:1) in order to lay the foundation for the Church (Eph2:20;

⁴ When the article is used with the Greek word for "faith", πίστις, it denotes the content of what is believed and is essentially a synonym for **doctrine**.

⁵ The salvation of sinners is not the goal of history. Rather, the goal of history is to bring maximum glory to the Creator, of which His redemption of (believing) men is only one (albeit very important) aspect.

4:7,11). There are only Twelve apostles, the apostate Judas having been replaced with Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be no more additions to these Twelve (cf. Rev21:14).

[6] Paul considers his audience, believers in Rome (v7), to "also" be "called" by Jesus Christ. That is, just as Paul was called to receive "grace and apostleship" (i.e., salvation and a call to specific works ordained by God for him; Act9:15-16), so all believers receive such a two-fold call (cf. Eph2:8-10). Personal salvation is not an end in itself, but the prerequisite to a life (perhaps an eternity) of works that will glorify God.

[7] Paul finally identifies the recipients of his letter as "all" the believers "in Rome". That Paul addresses believers individually, rather than the church in Rome (as he often does; cf. 1Cor1:2) may mean there were multiple assemblies of believers meeting throughout the city at this time. Paul greets these believers with his usual salutation of "grace and peace"; the order is significant, as the "grace" that results in the justification of a sinner before God is a prerequisite to having peace with God (Cp. Rom5:1).

These believers are "beloved of God" and "called ~~to be~~ saints". The N.T. consistently refers to all believers⁶ as "saints" (i.e., those who have been positionally sanctified, or justified, by God in Christ; cf. 1Cor1:2).

[8] Paul expresses his thankfulness to God for these believers, as he often does (Eph1:16; Col1:3; 1Thess1:2). He notes that the "faith" (Lit., "the faith of you"; i.e., their **doctrine**) of these believers in Rome was exemplary, known throughout "the whole world"⁷; they were reputed to be particularly sound in Christian doctrine. It is to believers who are the most doctrinally advanced that the Apostle Paul writes an epistle containing his most systematic and exhaustive doctrinal treatise of the gospel.

[9] Even though Paul had never personally met the believers in Rome, and knew them only by their reputation, he regularly prayed for them.

[10] Paul's consistent prayer was that he might be able to visit them in Rome. This was a desire expressed by Paul, which he consciously subordinated to "the will of God" (even as Jesus did in His own prayers; Cp., Matt26:39).

[11] Rome was the capital of the Gentile world, and Paul was called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul believed that his ministry among the (predominantly Gentile) believers in Rome would benefit them by "establish[ing]" them in the faith; though they were reputed to be doctrinally sound, they needed to be even more firmly grounded. This would be achieved by Paul's personally imparting to them "some spiritual gift". What does this mean? It

⁶ The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that sainthood is something achieved by a very small subset of Christians as a result of extraordinary works is unbiblical.

⁷ The expression "the whole world" was a first century idiom meaning the Roman Empire (Cp., Luk2:1), having the city of Rome as its capital.

cannot refer to the gifts of the spirit, as he makes clear elsewhere that their impartation to particular believers was solely the sovereign prerogative of God the Holy Spirit (1Cor12:1-11). By this expression Paul probably has in mind the use of his own spiritual gifts among them, especially authoritative apostolic instruction, which is that which edifies the Body of Christ by producing mature believers (Eph. 4:11-16).

- [12] Paul's ministry among the believers in Rome would spiritually benefit them immensely (v11), but the opportunity for fellowship with those having a "mutual faith" would also be a "comfort" to the apostle.
- [13] Paul indicates that he had long desired to visit the believers in Rome in order to minister among them, but that he was "let hitherto" (i.e., 'prevented thus far'), presumably by God (cf. Jas4:13-15); and yet, the Lord Jesus had long before told Paul that he was a "chosen vessel . . . to bear My name before Gentiles, and kings" (Act9:15), suggesting from the very beginning that Paul would (in God's perfect timing) preach in Rome. The phrase "even as among other Gentiles" suggests that the believers in Rome, whom Paul addresses in this epistle, were predominantly Gentile.
- [14] In the Hellenistic culture of the first century, a "barbarian" was anyone who did not speak Greek (linguistically, an example of *onomatopoeia*), so when Paul says both "Greeks" and "barbarians" it is a figure of speech (a form of synecdoche, specifically *merismus*), as is "the wise" and "the unwise", meaning **all men**. Paul considers himself to be a "debtor" to all men (i.e., men of every ethnicity and social status); because he was the recipient of God's grace, so undeserved (1Tim1:13-15), he takes seriously Christ's command to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk16:15).
- [15] Paul was "ready" (i.e., prepared and willing) to "preach **the gospel**" in Rome, in God's perfect timing; that time would indeed come for Paul (Act23:11).
- [16] Paul was ready to preach "the gospel of [i.e., concerning; Rom1:3] Christ" because in it, and in it alone, "is the power of God unto salvation"; salvation is not possible apart from "the gospel of Christ". Paul says he is "not ashamed of the gospel"; in contrast, the natural man will resist it with all of his being, since to him there is nothing more offensive than a gospel of pure and unadulterated grace which absolutely excludes human effort (cf. 1Cor1:21-29; Gal5:11). Finally, "salvation" by means of "the gospel of Christ" is available to "everyone that believeth", including both "Jew" and "Gentile". As God's chosen people (Rom3:1-2; 9:4-5; 11:26-29), the Jews were to receive priority in the preaching of the gospel⁸. But unlike the "gospel of the kingdom", which was offered exclusively to the "lost sheep of the

⁸ Consistent with this directive, (even as God's apostle to the Gentiles) Paul's pattern of ministry was always to first preach the gospel to the Jews of a city, in their synagogue (if there was one), and only turn to preaching the gospel to Gentiles in the marketplace after the Jews had rejected his message (cf. Act13:14,42; 14:1; 17:1,10-12; 18:4,19).

house of Israel" (i.e., Jews; Matt10:5-7), the "gospel of Christ" was also to be offered to the Gentiles.

- [17] What is necessary for salvation? A person must be righteous, which is impossible (Rom3:10), or be legally considered as "righteous". How righteous? As righteous as God, who is the standard of righteousness (Matt5:48; 6:33). This is much more than merely being without sin. God, in the Person of the Man Jesus Christ, lived a perfect human life, thus acquiring human righteousness in addition to His divine righteousness. It is the imputation of this perfect human/divine righteousness to the believer (2Cor5:21) that allows God to legally consider (i.e., reckon) him as righteous as Christ (Rom3:25-26).

The phrase "from faith to faith" is a Greek idiom expressing the idea that it is 'by faith from beginning to end', or 'entirely by faith at every point in the process, or in all its facets'. In other words, the "righteousness of God" made available to men in the gospel is received entirely by faith; there is no aspect of it that is, or can be, acquired in any other way. It is not the case that some men are justified by their faith, while others are justified by their works, or that justification is partly by faith and partly by works⁹; the "righteousness of God" is available **only** through personal faith (cf. Rom4:4-5; Eph2:8-9).

The New Testament Concept of Faith. Biblical faith is the human response God expects to His Person and His Word (Heb11:6). Faith is initiated by hearing truth from God, especially the gospel (Rom10:17; Gal3:2); in Ephesians 1:13, the chronological order of the events leading to personal salvation are given as: 1) hearing the word of truth, 2) believing the message (i.e., exercising faith), and 3) being sealed by the Holy Spirit. Faith requires truth from God as a prerequisite; it is dependent upon facts, not experience (1Cor15:1-4; 1Pet1:23). There is no inherent power in faith itself; the issue is not the magnitude of a person's faith, but the power of the Object in whom it is placed (i.e., God; cf. Matt17:20). Exercising personal faith in the gospel results in eternal life (Jn3:16; 20:31). Saving faith is not a gift from God, nor is it a work (Eph2:8-9); it is the human, non-meritorious response to grace. Biblical faith is not psychosis (retreat from reality), credulity (belief contrary to reality), indoctrination (parroting second hand knowledge), or conformity (acquiescence to force or pressure tactics). Biblical faith is trust/confidence in a reliable and powerful Object (i.e., God; His character, ability, words, acts, promises), and it is the **only** act of appropriation that is excluded from being classified as "work" (Rom4:4-5).

⁹ The error of the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of justification is that men can be made (not merely reckoned) righteous through a long process that includes faith in Christ, but also requires participation in the so-called sacraments of baptism, confirmation, mass, confession/penance (of/for all mortal sins), and last rights/extreme unction, finally to be followed by an extended period of time after death spent suffering for personal sins in purgatory. The RCC gospel, in contrast to the Biblical gospel, is clearly not "from faith to faith".

To support Paul's opening assertion that the gospel he preaches is not an innovation of his, but had been "promised afore by [the LORD's] prophets in the holy [O.T.] scriptures" (Rom1:2), he quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "the just shall live by faith".

II. THE WRATH OF GOD REVEALED (Romans 1:18-3:20)

OVERVIEW OF ROMANS 1:18-3:20: In this opening doctrinal section of Romans, Paul reasons his way to the conclusion that, "**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**" (Rom3:23), thus rendering all men everywhere and at all times justly condemned before God, whether they have heard the gospel or not; this sets up the need for all men to hear and respond to the gospel. Paul reaches his conclusion, in the case of the Gentile, based on the witness of general revelation alone, which is and always has been available to all men (and which is consistently rejected by the natural man). This witness of general revelation comes in two forms: 1) the creation (Rom1:18-32), and 2), human conscience (Rom2:1-16). Additionally, in the particular case of the Jew, who had special revelation from God (Rom3:1-2), he is also condemned by the Law (Rom2:17-3:20).

Rom1:18-32. **Condemned by Creation**; that is, no one can say he didn't know he was created by God (thus, accountable to Him).

Rom2:1-16. **Condemned by Conscience**; that is, no one can say he didn't know what he was doing was wrong (i.e., sin).

Rom2:17-3:20. **Condemned by Law**; that is, the purpose of the Law (given to the nation of Israel) was not to save, but to even more clearly reveal sin.

THE UNIVERSAL AND SUFFICIENT WITNESS OF CREATION

[18] The "wrath of God" is not merely an expression of emotion, as in 'God is angry', or even 'God is furious'; much more than mere emotion, the "wrath of God" is His divine attribute of holy justice "revealed from heaven". When God determines to execute justice on His creatures, their opportunity for grace/mercy has ended (Cp., Jer7:15-16; 1Jn5:16).

God asserts that the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" manifests itself as a "[suppression] of the truth in unrighteousness". Note that it is not the case that some men do not have access to the truth, but that all men suppress the truth that they have. Furthermore, there is an agenda in man's suppression of truth; it is so that he can pursue "unrighteousness" (i.e., sin).

[19] God has supplied all men with a knowledge of Himself (Cp., Act14:17). God has not relied on men seeking Him, as He knows none will (Rom3:11); rather, by His initiative, God "hath shown it unto them".

[20] This universal knowledge of God comes "from the creation" (i.e., the so-called natural world all around us; Ps19:1-6). Further,

God asserts that this knowledge of Himself is "clearly seen" and "understood". The ramifications of this assertion are awesome. No one can legitimately claim they didn't know or understand that their Creator God, to whom they are accountable, exists. Certainly many make this claim, but this is a "suppression of the truth" which they know (as creatures made in the image of God; Gen1:26; 5:1; Jas3:9) in their heart of hearts. It isn't a matter of not knowing or understanding, but rather a case of "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom1:28).

Universal Condemnation. Paul's conclusion is that from the witness of creation alone, **all men** "are without excuse". The Greek word translated "excuse" comes from **απολογία**, which means 'a formal, reasoned, and logical defense' (as in a legal, courtroom proceeding). Thus, there is no acceptable defense that can be offered for man's rejection of the knowledge of God from creation. This alone renders all men under the just condemnation of God. Whereas no one can be saved apart from hearing and believing the gospel (Rom1:16-17), all can be justly condemned whether they have heard the gospel or not. Put theologically, all men can be condemned on the basis of general revelation (available to all), but men can only be saved on the basis of special revelation (only available to some).

SUPPRESSION OF TRUTH ALWAYS LEADS TO IDOLATRY

- [21] Notice how Paul's reasoning proceeds from the preceding assertion (i.e., "they knew God" is now a presupposition from which he reasons). It is not the case that men don't know God, they definitely do. Rather, the issue is that men who know God do not "glorify" or "thank" (i.e., acknowledge) Him.

Implications for Evangelism. Scripture offers no 'proof' for the existence of God, and the so-called philosophical proofs (e.g., teleological, cosmological, ontological) for the existence of God are not fruitful in leading men to believe in God (and even if they were valid, they only purport to prove the existence of 'a god', not the God of the Bible); it is not a matter of men not having enough information to be persuaded to believe that God exists, but a suppression of the clear and sufficient information they already have. This has serious implications relative to evangelism. An evangelist ought never to accept an unbeliever's demand for a proof for God's existence before he will consider the claims of the Bible. The evangelist ought to begin with the presupposition that the unbeliever already knows God exists, but has willfully suppressed that truth in unrighteousness. Finally, the suppression of the truth (i.e., rejection of God's revelation) always and necessarily leads to idolatry, alluded to here as "vain . . . imaginations". It is interesting that in the Greek, the word translated "imaginations" is **διαλογισμος**, which means 'reasoning with oneself'; note, it is not someone else that the unbeliever is trying to persuade that his unbelief is rational/logical, but it is above all himself that he is trying to persuade (i.e., he must rationalize his unbelief in his own mind). This process of suppressing truth and turning to idolatry results in "their foolish heart [being further] darkened"; that is, unbelief perverts man's capacity to reason correctly.

The Essence of Idolatry. In both the Old and New Testaments, God's emphasis is always on the prohibition of idolatry (cf. Ex20:3; Deut5:7; 1Jn5:21), even over immorality. The reason is that idolatry always (logically) takes place first, with immorality inevitably following (cf. Rom1:18-32). Romans 1:18-22 indicates that God's revelation of Himself in the creation (i.e., general revelation) is clearly seen by all men, everywhere. The pagan mind must re-engineer its perception of reality in order to suppress the implications of this clear revelation, which is his personal responsibility to his Creator. **This re-engineering of reality to suppress God's clear revelation of Himself** (which manifests itself in various and diverse forms) **is the essence of IDOLATRY.** [Even if man's idolatry gives lip service to other "gods", they are gods made by man, after man's likeness, acceptable, manageable¹⁰, etc.] Once the creature's accountability to his Creator has been dismissed, he is free to engage in any form of immorality with a 'clear conscience' (so to speak). This is why idolatry always comes first (even in our modern world), and this is why God's prohibition of it always takes priority, even over immorality. In a certain sense, it is idolatry that enables immorality.

- [22] According to Scripture, the greatest possible folly is to deny the existence of the God of the Bible; "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Ps14:1; 53:1). Mark Twain, legendary in his skepticism of the Bible, offered the following definition: "faith is believing in what you know isn't true". By this he intended to imply that Christians know the Bible isn't really true, but believe it anyway; the Bible asserts the opposite, that unbelievers know that their unbelief is not rational, but pursue it anyway.
- [23] The unbeliever must rationalize his unbelief, and his construction of an alternate reality to explain the basic questions of life is idolatry. In ancient times, this manifested itself as belief in pagan deities that were no different than fallen men (only smarter, stronger, faster, etc., but without maintaining the Creator-creature distinction); in modern times, it manifests itself as scientific theories (e.g., the Big Bang, evolution) purporting to explain the origin of the universe and all life in it by purely naturalistic mechanisms. Either way, this is idolatry!
- [24] Even unbelieving men are not as bad as they could possibly be, since God is long-suffering (Rom2:4) and works in His creation to restrain creature sin, both supernaturally (Gen6:3) and

¹⁰ This is the idea behind the exchange between Susan and Mr. Beaver in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* regarding Aslan, the Christ-figure in the Chronicles of Narnia.

"Aslan is a lion, the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion" . . . "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver . . . "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

providentially (Rom13:1-5). "God also gave them up" is an indication that His forbearance and long-suffering have come to an end, and His ceasing to restrain unbelieving men's sin is an act of His justice upon them; in such a case, God has determined to allow men to do what their perverted hearts "lust" to do, and He will judge them for it. Notice that immorality, pursuing "the lusts of their own hearts", follows idolatry (not vice-versa), and without God's restraint on his sin man's degeneracy is measured by his sexual perversion, as they "dishonor their own bodies between themselves".

Abominations of the Canaanites. The Canaanites/Amorites were first rank idolaters, worshiping (among others) the demon gods Baal, Chemosh, and Molech (who demanded child sacrifice). After four generations of long-suffering (Gen15:16), the LORD "gave them up" (Deut18:12), which resulted in their degeneracy into the most vile forms of sexual perversion imaginable—described by Jehovah as "abominations" (cf. Lev18:6-30). As a consequence, the LORD commanded the nation of Israel to utterly destroy the inhabitants of Canaan (Deut7:1-5) as His just judgment of them. This pattern has been repeated throughout the course of history. There is a reason sexual degeneracy explodes as a people/nation approach their destruction; it is the sign that God has "[given] them up" (i.e., ceased to restrain their sin; Cp., Gen6:3).

[25] Idolatry is the "[exchange of] the truth of God" (i.e., the revelation of God in the creation, in the human conscience, in Scripture, and in Christ) for "a lie"; the particulars of the "lie" have changed down through history, but today are most notably advanced in Big Bang cosmogony as the explanation for the origin of the universe, evolution as the explanation of all life, and (as a result) secular humanism as the highest ethical standard (Cp., Judg21:25).

[26] Homosexual behavior, here between "women", is a sign that "God gave them up". It is termed a "vile affection". The Greek word translated "affection" is from *πάθος*, meaning 'an affliction¹¹ of the mind or emotion' (i.e., the Greek word has an inherently negative, not a positive, or even a neutral, connotation), which is intensified by the word translated "vile", meaning 'of dishonor, reproach, shame, ignominy, or disgrace'. Additionally, it is designated as a sin "which is [contrary to] nature"; not only is heterosexual attraction the natural order, but the bodies of a man and woman naturally "fit" together (anatomically)—by God's design (Gen2:18). Homosexual behavior is sin that rebels against God's natural (intended) purpose¹² for human sexuality.

Note this is a second of two rebellious exchanges. In v25, men "exchanged the truth of God for a lie", which is idolatry; in

¹¹ The American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, listing it as such in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), until 1973. It was similarly declassified by the World Health Organization in 1990.

¹² Another natural aspect of God's purpose in human sexuality is its role in procreation (Gen1:28; 9:1), which is impossible as a result of homosexual behavior.

vv26-27, they "exchange" natural sexual behavior (heterosexuality within the divine institution of marriage; cf. Heb13:4) for that which is unnatural (homosexual behavior; cf. Lev18:22).

- [27] And "likewise", homosexual behavior between "men", described as "men with men", is also included. The Greek word translated "lust" in this verse is not the common word, which can mean any strong desire, but a word that explicitly means 'sexual passion' (**ὄρεξις**; which only appears here in the N.T.). This behavior is labeled as an "error" which is "unseemly" (i.e., shameful). It is a sin that returns to the sinner "recompense", which has the idea of getting what one deserves; that is, the multitude of disastrous health/societal consequences that are associated with unchecked homosexual behavior are a part of God's just judgment against the sinner/society.
- [28] That "God gave them over to a reprobate mind" is a reference to the perverted thought process of fallen and unregenerate men whose sinful desires are no longer restrained by God. God's removal of His gracious restraint is a judgment against them; it follows their idolatry (i.e., "they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge").
- [29] Verses 29-31 contain a dreadful list of sins that inevitably erupt from the heart of men when they "suppress the truth [of God] in unrighteousness" (v18), and "God [gives] them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not seemly" (v28). This list has many similarities to the one Paul gave when describing the apostasy of the "last days" (2Tim3:1-5). Note especially the sin, "disobedient to parents", which appears in both lists (Rom1:30; 2Tim3:2). The family is God's divinely ordained training ground for teaching submission to proper authority; if a child will not submit to the authority of his parents, he will not submit to the authority of his Creator.
- [32] The condemnation is just because those who "commit such things" actually "[know] the judgment of God". That is, they know that what they are doing is sin (this issue will be taken up in more detail in the Romans 2 discussion of human conscience). Many of these sins carried the death penalty under the Law of Moses, and are "worthy of death" in a temporal sense; but any and every sin of the creature against the Creator warrants death in an eternal sense (Rom6:23). The condemnation is extended beyond those who actually commit these sins to those that "have pleasure in them that do them" (e.g., those who may not personally practice homosexual behavior, but nevertheless advocate for societal acceptance of those who do¹³).

CHAPTER 2

CONDEMNED BY CONSCIENCE

- [1] Paul's use of the expression "O man" indicates his assertion applies to every man (i.e., all men). He again charges that the

¹³ In this context, consider the modern maxim of tolerance (by which is almost always meant 'approval') of diversity of beliefs and alternative lifestyles.

behavior of all men is "inexcusable" (from same Greek word translated "without excuse" in Rom1:20; there is no reasonable defense or explanation that can be offered) in their unrighteousness. The judgment/condemnation Paul introduces here is that relative to moral awareness versus behavior. Paul's condemnation of them "that judgest" is for their own personal sins, not their act of judging the sins of others; specifically, they are judging as wrong in others behavior they practice and accept in themselves. It is **hypocritical judgment** that is condemned, not judgment *per se* (cf., Matt7:1-5 as contrasted with Jn7:24).

Moral Absolutes. We tell others they 'ought' to do this, or they 'ought not' to do that. But these 'oughts' are our implicit, innate recognition of **moral absolutes**. From where do such moral absolutes come? In a purely naturalistic universe with no God, there can be no basis for them. And yet, all men have a knowledge of them, whether they have a knowledge of Scripture (i.e., special revelation) or not.

- [2] Whereas the judgment of the natural man is hypocritical, God's judgment is according to three divine standards; the first, given here, is "**truth**". Truth is defined by the Person of Jesus Christ (Jn14:6) and is revealed to men in the written Word of God (Jn17:17).
- [3] Paul reiterates his addressee as "O man". As in v1, Paul is addressing all men. His argument applies to all men without exception. It is a surety that all men will face "the judgment of God", who will judge according to truth (v1). All men are both without excuse (v1) and without "escape".
- [4] Because of God's character of "goodness", "forbearance", and "long-suffering", He withholds His judgment of men for a period of time, the purpose of which is to provide an opportunity for "repentance" (Cp., 2Pet3:9).
- [5] However, man's failure to acknowledge this goodness of God is due to a "hardness" and "impenitent heart" (i.e., it is not because of ignorance of God; cf. Rom1:18). For this reason, during this time of forbearance, God's "wrath" (i.e., "righteous judgment") against their sins is being "treasur[ed] up" (i.e., accumulated and stored up as in a great reservoir, ever increasing, which will be released as a flood on "the day of judgment").

Illustrations. Illustrations of this include: 1) the world-wide flood in the days of Noah, before which God's Spirit "[strove] with man" for "an hundred and twenty years" (Gen6:3); and 2) "the iniquity of the Amorites" (Gen15:16), which God suffered for "four hundred years" (Gen15:16), before unleashing His wrath (i.e., righteous judgment) by commanding Israel to destroy them (Deut7:1-2; cf. Lev18:24-27; 20:23).

- [6] The unrepentant man, who has not availed himself of God's offer of salvation by grace through faith (Eph2:8-9), will be judged "according to his deeds" (cf. Rev20:11-15).

- [7] In this judgment "according to deeds" (v6), anyone found to have lived a life that was continually (i.e., perfectly) one of "well-doing" and "seek[ing]" for the "glory and honor" of God, they will be judged to have *merited* "eternal life".

The possibility that one might pass a judgment based on personal works is considered here only as a hypothetical situation; Paul will subsequently clarify that no one meets this standard (Rom3:10-12,23). Note that in the Great White Throne Judgment (of the unregenerate of all ages), all who are judged "according to their works" (Rev20:13) are found to be wanting, as all are "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev20:14).

- [8] On the other hand, for those who "do not obey the truth [as revealed by God]", but rather "obey unrighteousness" (cf. Rom1:18), they can expect "wrath" (i.e., righteous judgment).
- [9] The righteous judgment of God will be executed "of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile". This order of judgment does not suggest there will be any special consideration extended to the Jews; the emphasis here is that all will be judged, both Jews and Gentiles.
- [10] This verse concludes the *hypothetical* consideration, that at the judgment of God some might be found righteous on the basis of their own deeds (Cp., v7).
- [11] The first divine standard of judgment is truth (v2); the second divine standard of judgment is **impartiality**. Whereas Paul condemned men for using a different standard of judgment for others than they do for themselves (v1), God will apply the same standard of judgment to all men (both Jew and Gentile).
- [12] Gentiles "who have sinned without [any] law" are equally guilty as Jews who "have sinned in the law [of Moses]". Knowledge of the written law (i.e., Scripture) is not necessary to be justly "judged" by God. When the unbeliever stands before God in judgment, whether he had a Bible or not will be irrelevant to the issue of his just condemnation.
- [13] The law [of Moses], given to the Jews but not to the Gentiles, would only be of (hypothetical) benefit in justification before God if it were kept, which is not the case (Rom3:19-20).
- [14] The Gentiles are an example of men having an implicit, innate understanding of the righteous requirements of God, even without "the law [of Moses]" (i.e., the special revelation provided by Scripture).
- [15] God has written into every human "conscience" a knowledge of right and wrong (i.e., sin), whether one has access to Scripture or not, whether one has heard the Gospel or not. Human "conscience", meaning 'with knowledge', was activated in the Garden of Eden (Gen3:22), and together with creation and providence are part of God's general revelation to all men.
- [16] In the Day of Judgment, human conscience will be a universal witness sufficient to condemn all men. The third divine standard

of judgment is the Person of "**Jesus Christ**", who is the revelation of the character/nature of God to men (cf. Jn1:18).

THE JEW CONDEMNED BY THE LAW (OF MOSES)

The two universal (general) witnesses to the power and nature of God, creation and human conscience, have always been available to all men (both Jews and Gentiles); both of these forms of revelation serve only to condemn, not save. A third witness came into existence when God gave the Law (of Moses) to the nation of Israel (cf. Exod19:5-8). The Law was written revelation (i.e., special revelation). It was not generally available to all men, but only to Jews (and those who came into contact with them). Being written in form, the Law reveals much more information about God and His will (for Israel) than possible from creation or conscience. Nevertheless, the Law also served to further condemn (the Jew); salvation was not the purpose of the Law, nor did it have any power to save (Rom3:19-20).

- [17] The Jew is a special case (esp. in the OT). While the Gentile in general had only creation and conscience as his witnesses to the One true God, the Jew also had "the law"¹⁴ given to the nation of Israel through Moses at Mt. Sinai (i.e., the Law of Moses). While the revelation of God given to the Jew by means of the Law was certainly a unique privilege (cf. Rom3:1-2), it should never have become a source of pride relative to the Gentiles since it was bestowed on Israel by grace (Cp., Deut7:6-11). Furthermore, Israel sadly came to assume the Law had a power it most decidedly did not (i.e., to grant merit with God on those under it).
- [18] Instruction from "the law [of Moses]" certainly made it possible to "[know God's] will" in a much fuller way, which was not possible from the revelation given by creation and human conscience alone.
- [19] It was God's purpose in giving the Law to the nation Israel that by their living under its righteous ordinances before all the other nations of the world they would be "a guide" and "a light" to the Gentiles (cf. Deut4:5-8). The Law would be a witness to Jehovah, the God of Israel (the One true God) for the Gentiles only *indirectly*, as they observed its blessings and curses upon Israel.
- [20] It is true that "the law [of Moses]" contained "knowledge" and "truth" that could be obtained in no other way (i.e., revelation from God). It could indeed serve as an "instructor of the foolish" and a "teacher of babes" (Cp., Gal3:24). At this point in the text Paul interrupts his train of thought about the merits of "the law", essentially in mid-sentence (indicated by a "-" in the English text).
- [21] Paul abruptly interrupts himself because while the Law genuinely had the properties described in vv18-20, Israel did not properly

¹⁴ In this section of Romans, "law" preceded by the definite article (i.e., *the law*) denotes the Law of Moses and relates specifically to the nation of Israel. When "law" is used without the article, it relates to the principle of law in general (i.e., any law code).

use it for its intended purpose. Israel hypocritically believed it to be a divine standard for other (Gentile) nations, while herself failing to keep its requirements (which were principally intended for the nation of Israel, not the Gentile nations).

- [22] The issue of hypocrisy, raised in v1 relative to human conscience, resurfaces here relative to the law; Israel was quick to apply the standard of the Law of Moses to other nations, while failing to actually keep it herself.
- [23] Israel erroneously believed that the Law bestowed some privilege to them, above the Gentiles, even apart from keeping it (Jn7:19).
- [24] If the Jews genuinely believed that the Law of Moses was uniquely given to the nation of Israel as the revealed will of 'their' God, it would only be reasonable to expect them to keep/honor it in every particular. By failing to do so, Israel's implicit testimony to the Gentile world was that the word of their God was not that important¹⁵. Furthermore, by their failure to keep the Law, God's promised curse of letting Israel's enemies have victory over them will give the Gentile nations the false impression that their 'gods' are more powerful than the God of Israel (Cp., Isa52:5). In this way, Israel's failure to keep the Law of Moses resulted in "the name of God [being] blasphemed among the Gentiles".
- [25] There was no inherent benefit to "circumcision". Circumcision alone was useless; it was merely initiation into the Mosaic Covenant, which only "profit[ed]" the Jew if he actually kept the requirements of the Law¹⁶.
- [26] Here it is suggested that the "uncircumcision" (i.e., the Gentile) could profit from "the righteousness of the law" by keeping it, even apart from being circumcised. The point is that the Law of Moses only bestowed blessing on the Jew if he kept its requirements.
- [27] Taking this thought even further, if the Gentile (who "by nature" is not circumcised nor under the Law of Moses) actually keeps the righteous requirements of the Law, or at least its many moral imperatives known to him by means of human conscience (vv13-15), his behavior will actually be used by God as a witness against the Jew (who was both circumcised and in possession of the written Law) in His judgment of him.
- [28] Verses 28-29, along with Galatians 3:27-29 & 6:16, have been misunderstood and abused by many to teach that any and all true believers (whether ethnically Jewish or Gentile) are so-called 'spiritual Jews', and (therefore) heirs of the promises (which are also spiritualized in many, but not all, respects) made to the nation of Israel. This line of interpretation is not only incorrect, it is heresy, since it redefines the plain and clear

¹⁵ Consider this analogy: the many Christians today who loudly profess to believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the One true God, but who never even read it.

¹⁶ Note, the "profit" of keeping the Law of Moses was earthly blessings for the nation of Israel (Cp., Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-14), not personal salvation for any individual Jew.

promises God has made to the **physical** descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (e.g., Gen12:7; 13:15-16; Jer31:31-37).

What is in view here is an ethnic "Jew", a physical descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (as distinct from Gentiles), in right relationship with God (i.e., a believer); this right relationship is something that physical circumcision cannot accomplish. During the present Dispensation of Grace¹⁷, believing Jews and believing Gentiles are both incorporated into the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ. However, during the past Dispensation of the Law¹⁸, believing Jews and believing Gentiles remained distinct. Thus, within the nation of Israel there were both believing and unbelieving Jews; Paul's reference in v29 to the "Jew who is one inwardly" refers to the believing Jew within the nation of Israel.

CATEGORIES OF HUMANITY ON THE EARTH

Gentiles	Gentiles, Jews	Gentiles, Jews, Church	Gentiles, Jews	Gentiles, Jews, Bride
2,000 yrs	2,000 yrs	2,000 yrs	7 yrs	1,000 yrs
Gen.1	Gen.12	Act.2	Rev.4 (Rapture)	Rev.19 (2nd Coming)
				Rev.20+

[29] Rather than physical circumcision, "circumcision of the heart" is required for the Jew to be in right relationship with God. The concept of the "circumcision of the heart" is the O.T. expression of regeneration (cf. Deut30:6; Jer4:4; Ezek11;19; 36:26), analogous to the 'new birth' of the N.T. (Jn3:3-7). The point is that, even for the Jew, mere physical circumcision and a knowledge of the Law of Moses merits nothing before God.

CHAPTER 3

GREATER KNOWLEDGE – GREATER CONDEMNATION

- [1] Since physical "circumcision" and a knowledge of the Law of Moses did not provide the Jew with merit before God, was there any "advantage" the Jew had over the Gentile?
- [2] Paul asserts that the Jew had an unimaginable advantage, "chiefly¹⁹ because unto them were committed the oracles of God" (i.e., the scriptures). Whereas the Gentiles had only creation and conscience as their witnesses to the existence, power, and will of God (which is inherently limited), the Jews additionally had a much fuller revelation of God that the written Word of God provides. This verse is a strong suggestion, if not an outright

¹⁷ The Dispensation of Grace (Eph3:2) is God's administrative program that began on the Day of Pentecost (the birth of the Church) and will end at the Rapture (at which time the Church will be complete).

¹⁸ The Dispensation of the Law (alluded to in Coll:25-26) began with the giving of the Law (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant) to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai and ended with the death of Christ (which fulfilled the Law and ended the Mosaic Covenant).

¹⁹ Paul will revisit the issue of the Jew's advantage over the Gentile and provide a much fuller list in Romans 9:4-5.

assertion, that Jews were the (human) authors of all the books of the Bible (in both the Old and New Testaments).

- [3] The fact that "some" (or even most) Jews, who were the recipients of the Holy Scriptures (and thus had an advanced knowledge of God and His will), "did not believe" cannot change the character of God. Riding above the Law (of Moses), part of the conditional Mosaic Covenant, is the Abrahamic Covenant, in which God had unconditionally promised to bless the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen12:2-3; 26:24; 28:13-14). God's unchanging attribute of "faithfulness"²⁰ means that in His sovereignty/providence He will orchestrate blessing for the Jew, notwithstanding the Jew's apparent "unbelief"²¹ (cf. Mal3:6).
- [4] To the notion that God could possibly be "[un]faithful" (v3) relative to His unconditional covenant(s) with the Jews, Paul responds, "God forbid". This is not a literal translation of the Greek **μὴ γένοιτο**, but it captures the force of the idea being expressed very well. The verb (**γίνομαι**) has the meaning of 'be' or 'exist', but as used in this verse it occurs in the optative mood (which is the Greek mood most removed from reality); when used with the strongest negative particle (**μὴ**) in Greek, it expresses impossibility. It is **impossible** that God could be unfaithful.

The force of this verse is to assert the truthfulness of God in all His works and words. Up to this point in Romans, Paul has asserted that all men know and clearly understand that God their Creator, to whom they are accountable, exists—by means of His revelation to them through the creation, the human conscience, and (in the case of the Jew) the Law of Moses. The unbeliever has suppressed this truth in unrighteousness (Rom1:18), and the modern atheist/agnostic will certainly deny he possesses such knowledge. But Paul says, "yea, let God be true, but every man a liar". By this he means that even if every man who has ever lived sincerely asserts that he does not know God exists, it is God who is "true" and "every man a liar". To support such an assertion, Paul quotes Psalm 51:4 which suggests that in any fair judgment between God and men, God would be vindicated.

- [5] Paul entertains a (hypothetical) line of reasoning. If the "unrighteousness" of the Jews actually serves to accentuate, or magnify, the "righteousness of God" by giving Him opportunity to display His unconditional faithfulness to them, is this not a good thing? After all, in order for God to be shown to be gracious/merciful to rebellious creatures, He must have rebellious creatures; so the rebellion of the Jews (or men in general) is a necessary part of God's plan. Would it not be "unrighteous" for God to judge the Jews for their rebellion, since it only served to bring greater glory to God? Paul immediately notes that "I [reason] as a man", indicating the deficiency of this argument.

²⁰ Depending on context, the Greek word **πίστις** can mean either "faith" or "faithfulness". God, being omniscient, does not exercise faith, so the context demands that it is the attribute of "the **faithfulness** of God" that is in view in this verse.

²¹ This is not to suggest that any individual Jew can be saved without personally believing the gospel, but that at the time of the end God will sovereignly bring the nation of Israel to faith in Messiah/Christ (cf. Jer31:33-34; Ezek20:33-38; Rom11:25-29).

- [6] "God forbid" is the same Greek expression (**μὴ γένοιτο**) as in verse 4, again expressing impossibility. It is **impossible** that this line of reasoning could be valid, for if true it would mean that God could not righteously "judge the world" (which He has decreed that He will do).
- [7] Reiterating the hypothetical argument on a personal level, Paul asks why he would be "judged as a sinner" if his own "lie" only served to magnify the "glory" of God?
- [8] In essence, this line of reasoning argues: "Let us do evil, that good may come". As it turns out, Paul was "slanderosly" accused of advocating such an outrageous position by men who asserted that this was the logical conclusion of his teaching. By noting that their "damnation is just", Paul implies that such a line of reasoning cannot be held by genuine believers.

The Grace of God is Always Slandered. Those who preach a radical concept of pure, *absolutely free*²² grace have always been (and will always be) slandered. Even today, so-called Lordship Salvation proponents slander Free Grace preachers/teachers, accusing them of offering 'cheap grace' and alleging that such a message is inherently wicked because it inevitably leads to licentiousness (Cp., Rom6:1). It should be comforting to realize, from the inspired pages of Scripture, that the Apostle Paul suffered the same slanderous charge from his critics (Rom3:8). If one's own concept of God's grace does not expose itself to this kind of challenge, it probably isn't Biblical grace.

THE VERDICT: ALL MEN MAY BE JUSTLY CONDEMNED

- [9] The Jews were not "better" (than the Gentiles) in any meritorious sense, despite having a fuller revelation from God provided by the Law. The argument Paul has presented up to this point has "proved" that both "Jews" and "Gentiles" are "under sin" (i.e., both may be justly condemned by God).
- [10] To support his conclusion, and to highlight for the Jew that this conclusion is nothing new, but in perfect accord with the teaching of the Old Testament, Paul quotes Psalm 14:1-3. When David wrote, "There is none righteous, no, not one", he was speaking of Jews as well as Gentiles (cf. Eccl7:20). This is not an assertion meant to be taken as merely generally true, but extends to every individual who has ever lived.
- [11] There are no men who (apart from grace) "seeketh after God". In fact, God is unknowable apart from His revelation of Himself. It is for this reason that God has revealed Himself to all men (cf. Rom1:19-20; cf. Jn12:32). When men appear to seek God, it is only their response to God's revelatory initiative toward them.

²² It is not possible that *grace* can be anything other than 'free'. Free grace is a tautology, since the definition of grace is unmerited favor—it must of necessity be free. Paul asserted elsewhere that those who preach anything other than "grace" preach "another gospel" with no power to save (Gall6:9).

- [12] There is none, "no, not one" that "doeth good". All men are "unprofitable", from a Greek word meaning useless. The Hebrew word in Psalm 14:3 is translated "filthy" (Cp., Isa64:6).
- [13] Verses 13-18 are nothing more than a series of quotations from the Old Testament concatenated together which teach the wickedness and rebellion of every individual person who has ever lived. Verse 13 includes quotes from Psalms 5:9 and 140:3.
- [14] Quotation from Psalm 10:7.
- [17] Verses 15-17 are a paraphrase of Isaiah 59:7-8.
- [18] Quotation from Psalm 36:1 (cf. Matt10:28).
- [19] Not only is the Jew not in a better position before God than the Gentile, his position is actually worse, since "the law [of Moses]" only applies to those "under the law" (i.e., the nation of Israel, not the Gentiles). The purpose of "the law" was to further condemn those under it (going beyond the witness of creation and human conscience).
- [20] There is no article associated with the two uses of "law" in this verse. Paul is extending his conclusion from the specific case of the Law of Moses, which applied only to the Jews, to the principle of law in general (i.e., any and every conceivable law code). It is not possible that by keeping the provisions of any law code (including, but not limited to, the Law of Moses) that man can merit the favor of God; the very purpose of "law" (as a principle) is training in "the knowledge of sin" (Cp., Gal3:24).

Note carefully what Paul says in this verse. He does not say that man does not merit favor with God because he fails to keep His law. Rather, Paul asserts that "by the deeds of [the] law" (i.e., even if man should perfectly keep the law of Moses or any other conceivable law code) he would not be "justified" before God (Cp. Gal2:16). Why is this? See the addendum, WHY THE LAW CANNOT SAVE.

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED (Romans 3:21-8:39)

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul presented an exhaustive case for the condemnation of all men who have ever lived based on their rejection of God's revelation of Himself and His will to them in: 1) the creation, 2) the human conscience, and 3) the Law (in the case of the Jew). Furthermore, he declared that even had the Jew perfectly kept the Law [of Moses], or if any person keeps any conceivable law code, it cannot result in his justification before God (Rom3:20). Paul now shifts from man's sinful condition (which apart from the grace of God will result in his condemnation) to God's provision for man's sin. This provision is an imputed righteousness from God, appropriated solely by personal faith in Jesus Christ, which results in the justification of the believer.

Justification. "Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness as a result of God's imputing to believers Christ's righteousness, provided by God's grace through faith" (John A. Witmer). Justification is *forensic* because it is a declaration from God that He reckons, in a positional but legally binding sense, the sinner as righteous; justification does not make the sinner righteous in any practical sense.

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

[21] The conclusion of Paul was that in and of himself, not one person is righteous (Rom3:10). Furthermore, he asserted that no one can be justified (i.e., declared righteous) by keeping any law code (Rom3:20). Thus, if God had not or does not act, all are lost and will be eternally condemned.

However, "now" God has acted. He has revealed "a righteousness" which does not come from keeping the "law", but from "God" Himself. In the original Greek text, there is no article associated with "law", so it is the principle of law in general, or any law code in particular, that is in view; furthermore, the phrase "apart from [the] law" is in the emphatic position. This righteousness from God is a righteousness that cannot be obtained by keeping any law code (thus excluding all systems of works-based righteousness). Paul adds that this truth is not new, but in perfect harmony with "the law and the prophets" (i.e., the O.T.).

[22] This "righteousness of God" comes not by law-keeping, but "by faith"; the preposition "by" is the Greek *διὰ*, used here to indicate instrumentality. This righteousness is appropriated "by", or 'by means of' (often translated as 'through'), "faith". The object of "faith" is "Jesus Christ".

This righteousness of God that can be appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ is available to any and all "that believe". Since it does not come through the Law [of Moses], which was only available to the Jews, "there is no difference" between Jew and Gentile.

[23] All (both Jew and Gentile) are in need of this righteousness of God, since all "[have] sinned" (aorist tense verb, suggests our past participation in the primeval sin of Adam; Rom5:12), and all "come short" (present tense verb, suggests our continuous personal sins) of "the glory of God". The "glory of God" here is God's standard of righteousness, which is perfection (Matt5:48; 1Pet1:15-16).

[24] Though all have sinned, all may be "justified". God offers this justification to the sinner "freely", "by his grace" (since "grace" is inherently "free", this is a redundancy used for emphasis). However, because God cannot violate His own nature, which is one of righteousness and justice, He cannot overlook the sins which His creatures²³, objects of His grace, have committed.

²³ In contrast, *Allah* (the god of Islam) forgives sins without redemption, merely according to his own whim; thus, *Allah* is neither righteous nor just.

He must provide "redemption" (Lit., deliverance secured by a ransom payment) for them, which He has "in Christ Jesus".

- [25] The work of Jesus Christ (i.e., His death) was a "propitiation" (i.e., a payment that completely satisfies a debt) to secure the redemption of sinners. Christ's work of "propitiation" for sinners is personally appropriated "through faith [alone]". God "set forth" this work of propitiation for all to see on the cross of Calvary, in contrast to the atonement (i.e., a temporary, provisional covering) provided by the blood of animals applied to the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies, which was seen by the high priest alone.

Propitiation vs. Atonement. The sacrificial system of the O.T. provided atonement for the sins of believers. The Hebrew word used for **atonement** means 'a temporary, provisional covering'; it is used over 70 times in the O.T., almost all of which occur in the Pentateuch. The writer to the Hebrews makes clear that the atonement provided by these animal sacrifices could not actually "take away sins" (Heb10:4). In contrast, the Greek word for atonement is never used in the N.T. The sacrifice of Christ is referred to as a **propitiation** (Rom3:25; 1Jn2:2; 4:10), which is 'a payment that actually and completely satisfies a debt'. This distinction is consistently maintained in Scripture. Unfortunately, it can be extremely confusing since "atonement" has come to be used *theologically* to mean propitiation.

Here, "the remission of sins that are past" is a reference to the sins of men before Christ. No believer in the O.T. could actually be justified until the work of Christ was completed, since animal sacrifices provided atonement, not propitiation (Heb10:4). Through "the forbearance of God", God patiently, omnisciently waited for the work of Christ to be completed in order to "declare [i.e., reveal the preservation of] his righteousness" in saving O.T. saints; they were 'saved' on credit, as it were, since the payment of their sin debt (i.e., propitiation) was to be made in their future. For this reason, the O.T. saint went to "Abraham's bosom" at death (Luk16:22) rather than into the very presence of God in heaven (which is the case for N.T. saints; 2Cor5:8).

- [26] By Christ's work of propitiation, the "righteousness" of God is "declared" (i.e., manifested or revealed). God can be the "justifier" of all "who believeth in Jesus" and at the same time be "just" (i.e., not compromise in any way his own inviolate nature of righteousness and justice). It is impossible that God could justify sinners in any other way (Cp., Matt26:39).
- [27] Since God's provision for justification of the sinner is by grace through faith in the complete and finished work of Christ, "boasting" on the part of the recipient of God's grace is entirely "excluded" (cf. Eph2:8-9).
- [28] Paul's "conclu[sion]", then, is that man is "justified by [means of his] faith [alone]", explicitly "without" any "deeds of [the] law". Here, again, "law" occurs in the Greek text without an article, which indicates that law as a principle is in view; it is not merely that the keeping of the Law of Moses cannot justify,

but no conceivable law code of any kind can provide justification. Justification can only come by means of faith, not by means of law (i.e., works; cf. Rom4:5).

Justification by Faith and the Reformation. Arguably the spark that ignited the Reformation was Martin Luther's 95 Theses nailed to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg (Germany). While the majority of Luther's criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in that document related to the practice of indulgences, it was the doctrine of justification (i.e., the gospel) that became the central doctrine dividing Roman Catholics and the Reformers. The RCC defended its position of justification by faith *plus works* with a counter-reformation convened at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). There, Rome officially condemned the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Specifically, Canon 9 of Trent²⁴ asserted: "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification . . . let him be *anathema*" (i.e., the official doctrine of the RCC is that anyone who affirms that justification is by grace through faith alone will be damned to an eternity in Hell). In its place, Rome teaches an *infused* righteousness initiated by baptism and completed through observing their so-called sacraments. Roman Catholics are not Christians; they do not believe the Biblical gospel (cf. Rom4:5-6; Eph2:8-9; Gal2:16).

- [29] If justification could have come by means of the Law of Moses, the "Jews" would have had a tremendous advantage over the "Gentiles", and God could be charged with showing "respect of persons" (cf. Rom2:11). But God is the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, and His way of salvation includes Jews and Gentiles on an equal basis.
- [30] It is not the case that Jews (the "circumcision") are saved by keeping the Law, whereas Gentiles (the "uncircumcision") are saved by faith. There are not multiple ways of salvation; there is, always has been, and always will be only one. The sovereign and impartial "one God" will "justify" both the Jew and the Gentile "through faith" (and by no other way).
- [31] Since justification comes "through faith", does this "make void the law"? Absolutely not. In fact, it "establish[es] the law". The appropriate use of the Law is for "the knowledge of sin" (Rom3:20), a much fuller and complete knowledge than can be obtained through the witnesses of creation and conscience alone. This knowledge of sin obtained from the law was designed "to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal3:24). Furthermore, when Christ (conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit so as to be untainted by the primeval sin of Adam; Luk1:35) perfectly kept the Law, He "fulfilled the Law" (Matt5:17) and by doing so acquired human righteousness on our behalf; when He willingly suffered crucifixion, He endured the

²⁴ All the canons of Trent were reaffirmed at Vatican Councils I and II (1868-1870 and 1962-1965, respectively). Official Roman Catholic doctrine regarding salvation (i.e., the gospel) has not changed since the Reformation.

curse of the Law in our place (Gal3:13). Thus, it is through the mechanism of the Law that the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, and the imputation of the believer's sin to Christ, may be accomplished (2Cor5:21).

CHAPTER 4

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Paul asserted in the opening salutation of this letter that the gospel which he preaches is not an innovation of his, but is entirely consistent with God's prior revelation in the Old Testament (cf. Rom1:1-2). The Biblical gospel has always been that God justifies sinners by grace, through faith, apart from any works of law. In Romans 4, Paul considers Abraham. Abraham obeyed God. When commanded by God, Abraham left Ur (Gen12:1,5), he underwent circumcision when he was 99 years old (Gen17:11,24), and offered his beloved son Isaac (Gen22:2,9-10); surely Abraham was justified by his works? But Scripture declares, "[Abraham] believed *in* the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen15:6) – and this even before Abraham was circumcised. The conclusion is that **Abraham was justified by his faith**, not by his works.

ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

- [1] To support his assertion that justification has always been by faith, apart from any works, Paul would have the reader consider Abraham (the progenitor of the Jewish race, to whom the Law of Moses would in time be given).
- [2] If "Abraham were justified by works", Paul's argument that justification has always been by faith, so as to exclude "boasting" (Rom3:27), would be irrefutably undercut.
- [3] The "scripture" must be the authority concerning this question (Isa8:20), and scripture declares unequivocally that "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness²⁵" (a direct quotation of Gen15:6).
- [4] If a believer's "work[s]" had any role in his justification, then justification could not be said to be of "grace"; in the Bible, grace and works are viewed as being incompatible with one another. Furthermore, if justification included works, which a man performed, then God would be in his "debt" (i.e., He would be *obligated* to justify that person).
- [5] Paul now extends the experience of Abraham to all believers. For *anyone* who "believeth on Him", and "that worketh not", God assures that "his faith is counted for righteousness" just as it was in the case of Abraham.

In v4, grace and works were seen to be incompatible; in this verse, faith and works are similarly declared to be incompatible

²⁵ To "count" (i.e., declare, or reckon in a positional or forensic sense) for "righteousness" is the definition of justification (see page 22 of notes).

with one another. If justification is by works, it cannot be by grace or faith; if it is by grace/faith, it cannot include works. To include any work in justification is to pervert the gospel of grace (Gall1:6-9).

- [6] This experience of Abraham relative to justification by faith in the O.T. was not unique. Paul notes that King David also taught that the blessed man was one "unto whom God imputeth righteousness **without** works".
- [7] Verses 7-8 are a quotation from Psalm 32:1-2, a psalm of David.
- [8] The "blessed . . . man" is the one to whom the Lord "will not impute sin", but will rather impute (i.e., reckon, declare) the righteousness of Christ (2Cor5:21).

JUSTIFICATION IS APART FROM RELIGIOUS ORDINANCES

- [9] If the "blessedness" of justification was "reckoned to Abraham" according to his "faith", such a means of justification is available to both "the circumcision" (i.e., Jews) and "the uncircumcision" (i.e., Gentiles).
- [10] Although Abraham was circumcised²⁶ (Gen17:24), his circumcision came after he had already been declared righteous by faith (Gen15:6). Since Abraham was justified by faith before he underwent circumcision, his circumcision could not have anything to do with his justification. Thus, even religious ordinances (e.g., circumcision or baptism) are excluded as requirements for justification.
- [11] Abraham had "faith", by which he was justified, when he was yet "uncircumcised". That he subsequently underwent circumcision was a "sign" of his faith (analogous to believer's baptism as a testimony to personal faith during the Church Age).
- [12] Thus, Abraham's justification by faith is the pattern for all regardless of circumcision (i.e., both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith, *and no other way*).

JUSTIFICATION IS APART FROM THE LAW

- [13] Abraham's (and that of "his seed") special relationship with God came not through the Mosaic Covenant, which was a conditional covenant (in which works were required; Exod19:5), but was a "promise" integral to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen12:1-3), which was an unconditional covenant in which no works on the part of Abraham were required. Whereas Israel's righteous standing before God was according to works under "the law" (i.e., the Mosaic

²⁶ Although circumcision would subsequently be included in the Law of Moses, Abraham's circumcision had nothing to do with the Law; the circumcision of Abraham and his descendants was/is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen17:11), not the Mosaic Covenant (the sign of the Mosaic Covenant was Sabbath observance; Exod31:16-17).

Covenant), it is according to "faith" under the Abrahamic Covenant.

- [14] If only those "who are of the law be heirs" of God, justification would be: 1) by works, and 2) available only to Jews. In such a case, there would be no effectual role for personal "faith", and God would not be able to extend an unconditional "promise" to either Jews or Gentiles.
- [15] There is no article in the Greek text associated with "law" (vv13-15), so it is the principle of law that is in view (i.e., any conceivable law code), not the Law of Moses only; any and every "law worketh wrath", meaning that law necessitates the righteous judgment of God when it is broken. To put a people under law means that that law only serves to increase judgment by increasing "transgression" against it (since law has no power to save).
- [16] Whereas grace and faith are both incompatible with works (vv4-5), faith is compatible with grace (i.e., the requirement of personal faith in order to receive God's grace is not a work). Since justification is "by grace" (not law-keeping), God's "promise" (to Abraham to bless both Jews and Gentiles; Gen12:2-3) can be "sure" since it does not depend on the works/obedience of the one receiving it; this is true both of the Jew (i.e., him "which is of the law") and the Gentile (i.e., him "which is of the faith of Abraham", who was justified apart from the law; Gen15:6; Rom4:11).
- [17] Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 to demonstrate that this view of justification of both Jew and Gentile apart from the law is not new. God made this promise to Abraham, to make him "a father of many nations" when Abraham (100) and Sarah (90) had no son, nor were they biologically capable of having children (Gen17:17; 18:11); though Sarah's womb was "dead", God knew He would supernaturally open it (Gen18:10-14).

The Church and the Abrahamic Covenant. God's promise to bless "all families of the earth" (i.e., both Jew and Gentile) with salvation by grace, through faith, apart from works/law was part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen12:3). This blessing is inherent in God's promise to make Abraham the (spiritual) father of many peoples (Gen17:5). The Abrahamic Covenant, however, was made with Abraham, not the Church. The fact that God's covenant with Abraham includes a provision to save believers in the Church Age does not make the Church a party to this covenant (nor to the New Covenant; cf. Jer31:31). Although Church Age believers are identified with Abraham as their spiritual father (Rom4:11,16), this identification extends only to the "promise" (singular; Gal3:29) of salvation (through faith) extended to the whole world; it does not mean Church Age believers partake of those provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant that are promised to Abraham's physical (i.e., biological) descendants alone (i.e., a land and a nation; Gen12:1-2); those who spiritualize the land/nation provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant and attempt to apply them to the Church do so in grave error.

- [18] Abraham, "against hope" (i.e., in spite of the circumstances of Sarah's dead womb; v19) "believed in hope". This second use of

"hope" relates to God's promise to give Abraham and Sarah a son. In fact, in New Testament usage, "hope" almost always pertains to a promise of God (which, by definition, is sure) that is yet unfulfilled. It was when Abraham "believed" God's yet unfulfilled promise, "So shall thy seed be" (Gen15:5), that God "counted it to [Abraham] for righteousness" (Gen15:6).

- [21] It is from vv19-21 that a clear understanding of the New Testament concept of "faith" can be derived. Biblically, **"faith" is believing the "promise of God"**. Believing is tantamount to "being fully persuaded". Faith is not merely believing in the existence of God (Jas2:19), but believing what God has said. Revelation from God is the basis of faith.

Every "promise of God" is sure and will come to pass in time. If the promise has not yet come to pass, it is referred to as a "hope" (Cp., Tit2:13). Faith is "believ[ing] in hope" (v18); in other words, faith is believing the promise of God that has not yet come to pass, regardless of how impossible, from a human perspective, fulfillment of that promise appears to be. For Abraham, the promise of God concerned the supernatural birth of a son to him and Sarah; for us, the promises of God are different²⁷ (e.g., Jn3:16; 1Cor15:1-4).

- [22] It was when (i.e., on condition of) Abraham believed God's promise to him (Gen15:5) that "it was imputed to him for righteousness" (a quotation from Genesis 15:6). This is a clear testimony (from the O.T.) that Abraham was justified by faith. Abraham was saved by means of an "imputed" righteousness, not a righteousness of his own merit.
- [23] Abraham's justification (i.e., salvation by grace, through faith, apart from any works) is not merely a description of how God dealt with Abraham individually.
- [24] Abraham's justification is a prescription for the justification "for us also". The gospel provides for men to be saved by an "imputed" righteousness of God (Rom1:16-17) that is granted to sinners by grace, through faith, apart from any works (Cp., Eph2:8-9). The sole condition for salvation is "if we believe" (i.e., personal faith). The object of faith is the same as it was in Abraham's day, although content of faith is today much richer. The object of faith today is still God (i.e., "Him that raised up Jesus").
- [25] The content of faith today is the gospel (1Cor15:1-4), summarized here as: 1) the death of Christ as a propitiation "for our offenses" (1Cor15:3), and 2) the resurrection of Christ "for our justification" (1Cor15:4). The resurrection of Christ is an indispensable element of the gospel, for it demonstrates His work of propitiation on our behalf was accepted by God (1Cor15:17; cf. Rom1:4). According to John Witmer, "Christ's death as God's sacrificial Lamb (cf. John 1:29) was to pay the redemptive price

²⁷ Consider Charles Ryrie's formulation in this regard: "The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations." (*Dispensationalism*, 1995, p. 115)

for the sins of all people (Rom. 3:24) so that God might be free to forgive those who respond by faith to that provision".

CHAPTER 5

THE BENEFITS OF JUSTIFICATION

- [1] This verse begins with "Therefore"; it begins an enumeration (vv1-11) of benefits enjoyed by the believer that result from "being justified by faith". Justification provides for the reconciliation of the believing sinner with God. Prior to our justification, we were enemies of God (cf. Rom5:10); after it, "we have peace with God". This peace comes only through "Jesus Christ", who is "the one mediator between God and men" (1Tim2:5; Cp., Eph2:14).
- [2] Furthermore, "we have access" (Lit., *privilege of approach*) to "stand" in the "grace" of God forevermore. This access to grace goes beyond our justification and includes our sanctification, which is also "by faith" (cf. Gal3:1-5). Contrast this privilege of access to God available to the believer today "by faith" (Heb4:16) with the restrictions imposed in the O.T. where access to God was mediated by a priesthood which oversaw an elaborate sacrificial system, and in which even the high priest could enter the presence of God only once per year on the Day of Atonement; this difference is due to our justification made possible by the finished work of Christ.
- We also "rejoice in hope" (i.e., the confident expectation of a yet unrealized promise of God) that in due time (i.e., at our glorification, which is the consummation of our salvation; cf. Rom8:29-30) we will share in "the glory of God", which at present we "come short of" (Rom3:23).
- [3] We can "also" rejoice/"glory" in "tribulations", which are the present experience of believers promised by our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn16:33), knowing that God is using them in our sanctification process to develop "patience" (i.e., perseverance; Cp., Jas1:2-3).
- [4] That is, the experience of tribulations by the believer is not a time when God has forsaken us, but is a time when God is active in refining our "experience" (Greek, *δοκιμή*; 'approved **character**'). A believer's character, which has been refined by perseverance in trials (cf. 1Pet1:6-7), is one that exhibits "hope" (i.e., confident assurance that God's promises will come to pass).
- [5] The believer will never be "ashamed" (i.e., frustrated or disappointed) of his "hope", for all the promises of God in Christ are sure (2Cor1:20). The "Holy Spirit", who now permanently indwells every believer (Eph1:13-14; 4:30), gives us this confidence.
- [6] The ultimate demonstration of the "love of God" (v5) for us is Christ's work on our behalf. Even when we were "ungodly" enemies of God, and "without strength" (i.e., powerless to merit favor with God), "Christ died for [us]".

Substitutionary Atonement. In the declaration, "Christ died for the ungodly", the preposition "for" is the Greek ὑπὲρ used with an object (ἄσεβων, "ungodly", wicked, or sinful; gen. pl. m. adj.) in the genitive case, which carries the idea of 'in behalf of', or even 'in place of'. Thus, the death of Christ was actually a substitute for the death of "the ungodly". Furthermore, in the Greek text "ungodly" is plural and anarthrous, so it is not a particular group of ungodly men (such as 'the elect' only), but undifferentiated or unqualified ungodly men (i.e., all ungodly men). When Christ died, He died as a substitute for all men (allowing God to freely justify any and every man who believes). This is the doctrine of **Substitutionary Atonement** (where atonement is used in the theological sense of propitiation).

- [7] From a human perspective, it is rare and unusual that one man would die "for"²⁸ another, even one who is considered "good" and "righteous".
- [8] What God has done to "commendeth [i.e., demonstrate] his love toward us" differs from the human analog in both nature and extent. "Christ died", not for the rare/unusual person who deserved his sacrifice, but for undeserving "sinners". "Christ died for us" includes yet another use of ὑπὲρ with an object ("us") in the genitive case, clearly teaching that His death was in our place.

Some, using this verse in isolation, have argued that by using the pronouns "us" and "we", Paul is asserting that Christ died (only) for himself and those he is addressing in this epistle, who are believers (Rom1:7). They do so to support the idea that the work of Christ was intended to benefit only the elect (i.e., Calvinism's doctrine of Limited Atonement). However, such an argument is inconsistent with the present context, namely v6, in which the death of Christ is asserted to be for all ungodly men without limitation. Here, in a pastoral sense Paul has personalized the intentionality of the death of Christ to himself and his readers, but by doing so he has not excluded others from it.

- [9] Being "justified by [Christ's] blood" is the present (i.e., "now") experience of every believer and includes all the benefits enumerated in vv1-8. Looking toward the future, it ensures the believer "shall be saved from wrath" (i.e., the righteous judgment of God which will result in unbelievers being consigned to the Lake of Fire for all eternity; cf. Rev20:11-15).
- [10] The "death of [God's] Son" has resulted in the believer being "reconciled" to God. Furthermore, "by his life" (i.e., the perfect human life Christ lived on earth, thus meriting human righteousness) the believer "shall be saved". This verse has in view the **double imputation** relative to the work of Christ involved in saving the sinner. Namely, our sins imputed to Christ such

²⁸ Verse 7 includes two additional uses of ὑπὲρ with objects in the genitive case. The idea is clearly that the one who would "die" *in place of* another does so in order that the beneficiary of the sacrifice might live.

that His death provides propitiation for them, and Christ's (human) righteousness imputed to us (Cp., 2Cor5:21).

- [11] Although the KJV uses the English word "atonement" in this verse, the Greek word should be translated "reconciliation". Because of our justification made possible by all that Christ has done for us, we (who were once "the ungodly" and "sinners") have been reconciled to God. Not only does this bring peace (v1), but it should also bring "joy".

JUSTIFICATION AND CONDEMNATION COMPARED/CONTRASTED

- [12] Although there had been prior sin among the angelic host in heaven (Isa14:12-14; Ezek28:12-15; Rev12:3-4), it was the act of "one man" Adam in the Garden of Eden by which "sin entered into the world" (Gen3:6). Since God had decreed that sin would be punished by "death" (Gen2:17), there was no death in God's creation prior to the sin of Adam²⁹. After Adam's sin, not only did he and Eve die, but all of their progeny would die as well (1Cor15:21-22; Cp., Gen5:3ff), for in Adam "all sinned" (this verse asserts a genuine participation in the sin of Adam by all men).

Original Sin and the Human Race. All men since Adam are born (even *conceived*; cf. Ps51:5) under the condemnation of God. This is because, in the Garden of Eden, "all [men] sinned" (Rom5:12) in Adam. Adam was not merely the representative or federal head of the human race, he was its *seminal* head (Cp., Hebrews 7:9-10); Adam was even the seminal (i.e., biological) head of Eve because of the way God took her from the "rib" of Adam (Gen2:21-23), which is why all men are condemned "in Adam", not "in Eve" (even though Eve's own sin occurred prior to that of Adam).

- [13] The idea behind this verse is that from the time of Adam, who was given the command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen2:17), until the revelation of additional commands from God (i.e., "law") at the time of Moses (v14), it was not possible for men to break a command of God (since God expelled Adam from the Garden and prevented re-entry by armed cherubim; Gen3:24).
- [14] Nevertheless, all men continued to die (cf. Gen5:3ff), so "sin was in the world" (v13) even though individual men after Adam had not "sinned after the similitude of Adam" (i.e., they had not personally broken any command of God). Men died because they were under the condemnation of God for their participation in the (original) sin of Adam.

The final clause identifies Adam as "the figure³⁰ of him that was to come", which is Jesus Christ, who is elsewhere called "the last Adam" (1Cor15:45). The remainder of this chapter will elaborate

²⁹ The theory of evolution, in all its forms (including so-called theistic evolution), is anti-Biblical since of necessity it requires millions of years of animal death prior to the arrival of the human race.

³⁰ The Greek word translated "figure" is *τύπος*, from which we get the concept of a 'type'.

on the typology of Adam and Christ, who are the heads of two human races.

- [15] The "offense" (sin) came by the action of "one" (i.e., Adam), resulting in death of "[the] many"³¹. So also, by the action of "one man, Jesus Christ" the "grace of God" may be extended to "[the] many". Exactly the same designation, "[the] many" (Greek, *οἱ πολλοὶ*), is used of those who are participants in the sin of Adam and those who are the (potential) subjects of God's grace, consistent with the understanding of an Unlimited Atonement.
- [16] Whereas by the one "sin" of Adam, the "judgment" of God resulted in the "condemnation" of all men, the "free gift" results in "justification" even after "many offenses" (i.e., justification by the grace of God includes all the personal sins of men, not merely their participation in the original sin of Adam).
- [17] Whereas "death reigned" over all men as a judgment for Adam's "offense", "life" will "reign" over those who "receive" the "gift of righteousness" that comes by "one [man], Jesus Christ". Note that the condemnation in Adam is universal, including all men, but justification is not; God's "gift of [Christ's] righteousness" must be "receive[d]" in order to be effectual for any individual.
- [18] By "the offense of one" (Adam), all are condemned. But by "the righteousness of one" (Christ), the "justification" of "all men" is made possible. Here, the "justification" of "all men" must be understood as a possibility (consistent with an Unlimited Atonement), not a certainty (the free gift must be received by personal faith), since Scripture is clear in its testimony that not all men will be saved (Matt7:13-14; Rev20:1-15).
- [19] Whereas Adam's "disobedience" resulted in all his descendants being designated "sinners", Christ's perfect "obedience" results in all who are in Him being declared "righteous" (i.e., justified).

Two Human Races. Romans 5:12-21 views all men as members of one of two human races. All men are born into the human race which has Adam as its (seminal) head (Gen5:3), which is a human race destined to die both physically and eternally. Believers, however, by being born again (Jn3:7) become a new creation (2Cor5:17) and are transferred by Spirit baptism (1Cor12:13) into a new human race which has Christ as its Head (Eph1:22-23; Col1:18), and which is destined for resurrection and eternal life (1Cor15:21-22).

- [20] When "law entered" (i.e., additional commands of God were given to men), it was not for the purpose of providing a way of salvation; rather, it was so that "the offense might abound" (i.e., human transgression would multiply beyond the original sin of Adam). But this would only serve to make "grace . . . abound"; that is, the grace of God would be even more gracious, covering not only

³¹ The repeated use of "[the] many" (Greek, *οἱ πολλοὶ*) in vv15-19 is not meant as a contrast to the "all" of v12. It is used to emphasize that the "all" of v12 is a vast multitude of men.

the original sin of Adam, in which the whole human race participated, but also the multitude of personal sins that would result from transgression of the additional commands of God given in history. No amount of human sin, in either quantity or degree, can exceed the grace of God.

- [21] "That" is the Greek *ἵνα*, which always introduces a purpose clause (could be translated "so that"). The purpose of Christ's work was to enable God to offer as a gift of "grace" the "righteousness" of Christ obtained by perfect human obedience to God, which results in "eternal life", to all men who participated in the "sin" of Adam and are born under a condemnation which will result in "death".

The same Greek verb, *βασιλεύω* (to reign), is used twice in this verse. In the clause "sin **hath reigned** unto death", it occurs in the indicative mood, meaning it is an assertion of reality. But in the clause "**might** grace **reign** through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord", it occurs in the subjunctive mood, which expresses possibility. The sin of Adam most assuredly brought universal guilt and condemnation upon all men; all (without exception) in Adam will die (1Cor15:22). The work of Christ makes possible the new birth [in Christ], the imputation of "righteousness", and "eternal life" (i.e., salvation). However, God's gift of salvation is not imposed or assured; it must be received by personal faith, which will only be exercised by some.

CHAPTER 6

POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION

REVIEW OF ROMANS 3-5: Romans 3:21-5:21 defined and defended the doctrine of justification (by grace, through faith alone). Justification is the work of God in which He *declares* a sinner righteous on the basis of Christ's work on his behalf (i.e., both His perfect human life and His substitutionary, sacrificial death). In justification God deals with the guilt of sin by justly forgiving it, and the believer is forever delivered from condemnation/punishment for it (Rom8:1).

PREVIEW OF ROMANS 6-8: One of the important results of justification (unique to the present age) is the permanent giving of the Holy Spirit to the believer (Rom5:5) to empower his new nature and guide his new life. Thus begins the section of Romans on **sanctification**, which is the subject of Romans 6-8. Sanctification is the process by which God makes the believer holy (Rom6:19). In sanctification God deals with the power of sin in the life of the believer.

Romans 6 sets forth the right way of sanctification for the believer (cf. Rom6:11-12). As our justification is by faith, apart from works, so our sanctification is also by faith (cf. Gal3:1-5); the believer grows in holiness as he exercises faith in his personal union with the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. McClain, "Believe to be true what God says is true—that we died, were buried, and were raised from the dead with Christ" (p. 28).

UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE BELIEVER'S NEW NATURE

- [1] Paul declared in Romans 5:20 that no amount of human sin, in either quantity or degree, can exceed the grace of God; that is, God can justify the worst of sinners (Cp., 1Tim1:15). This assertion is a glorious exaltation of the limitless power of the grace of God. However, legalists (from the Judaizers of Paul's day to the proponents of so-called 'lordship salvation' today) have consistently recoiled from this truth, fearful that it provides a license to sin. In this verse, Paul raises this very issue for consideration.
- [2] Paul raises this issue for the purpose of categorically rejecting it, "God forbid" (Greek **μὴ γένοιτο**, an impossibility; see discussion of this expression in the notes at Romans 3:4). For Paul, it is a logically impossibility that believers who are positionally "dead to sin" should continue to "live . . . in it".
- [3] The first step in the believer's sanctification is to "**Know**"³² (also vv6,9,16). Specifically, understand that when believers are "baptized"³³ into Jesus Christ", that includes being "baptized into his death". Baptism always has the idea of *identification*. By (spirit) baptism the believer is identified with (i.e., put spiritually in union with) Christ in a comprehensive way. This identification with Christ includes identification with Him in His death, which is what Paul meant in v2 when he asserted that believers are "dead to sin".
- [4] Following Christ's death and burial, He was "raised up from the dead" (i.e., resurrected). In union with Christ, the believer has been spiritually "raised up"³⁴; thus, "[believers] also should walk in newness of life". The Greek verb "should walk" is in the subjunctive mood, expressing possibility, permission, or intentionality, but not implying certainty. God's purpose or intention for believers in being identified with Christ in His death/resurrection is that we would "walk" (i.e., behave) differently after our conversion. However, this verse does not teach that such a change in behavior is assured³⁵.
- [5] The resurrection of Christ was not merely a resuscitation of His former, earthly and mortal body; it was the creation of an entirely new form of human life. Such is also the case for the believer who has been "planted" (i.e., united) with Christ. The new birth (Jas1:18) that occurs in the believer is not a

³² Faith is not merely mental assent, but it does require specific knowledge upon which to act.

³³ This is a reference to spirit baptism (not water baptism), which is the work of the Holy Spirit by which the believer is incorporated into the Body of Christ (cf. Matt3:11; Act1:5; 1Cor12:12-13).

³⁴ Water baptism (by immersion) is a perfect depiction of the believer identifying with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection; no other mode of baptism properly pictures this identification. Furthermore, the Greek word **βαπτίζω**, transliterated into English as "baptize", simply means *to immerse*.

³⁵ A fatal error of so-called 'lordship salvation' is its denial of the reality of carnal Christians (1Cor3:1-3); that is, that professing Christians who continue to be involved in heinous or habitual sin cannot be genuine believers. Its presupposition that sanctification of the believer in the present life is assured is not Biblical (see discussion at Romans 8:30).

reformation of his old, sinful nature; rather, it is the creation of an entirely new nature (2Cor5:17) which is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph4:24), and for this reason it "cannot sin" (1Jn3:9).

- [6] The believer must "[Know] this", that our "old man [was] crucified with [Christ]", where the verb is in the aorist (past) tense, passive voice (God's work, not ours), and indicative mood (reality). The "old man" does not refer to our sin nature, which is not eradicated from the believer at the new birth, but is merely referring to the person he was previously, described as "under sin" (Rom3:9), "without strength" and "ungodly" (Rom5:6), a "sinner" (Rom5:8), and an "enemy [of God]" (Rom5:10). Here, "crucified with him" is analogous to "baptized into his death" (v3) and "[united] together in the likeness of his death" (v5).

The believer's being "baptized into"/"united in"/"crucified with" Christ is "[so] that" (Greek *iva*, introducing a purpose clause) the "sin", which heretofore enslaved his "body", "might be destroyed". The verb "destroyed" has the idea of 'do away with', 'annul', or 'render inoperative'; it occurs in the subjunctive mood, expressing a purpose or possibility.

- [7] Whereas the unbeliever (i.e., "old man") was enslaved to sin (v6), the believer (who has been regenerated) is "freed from sin". This phrase, however, is more literally translated as "has been justified³⁶ from sin". In other words, having been declared righteous by God, sin no longer has a legal right to control the believer.
- [8] Verses 8-11 are a recapitulation of vv5-7. Since believers are identified with Christ in His death, so "we believe" (present tense, meaning 'we keep on believing') that "we shall also live with him". This is the answer to the question raised in v1. The believer should not continue in sin, but rather "live with him", the resurrected and glorified Christ, with whom we have been united.
- [9] One passes through death but once. The resurrected Christ will never again experience "death", nor can it exercise "dominion" (or any influence at all) "over him", as it does over all other men.
- [10] When Christ "died", He died "[with reference] unto sin once". The Greek adverb, *ε̅φ̅α̅πα̅ξ̅*, translated "once", has the force of 'all at once', 'on one occasion', or 'once for all [time]'. The emphasis is that the death of Christ was a unique, one time event, never to be repeated³⁷ (Cp., Heb9:25-28). In contrast, in His resurrection Christ "liveth [with reference] unto God"; the present tense used emphasizes continuous (unending) action (Cp., Heb7:16). Witmer, "Resurrection life is eternal in quality and everlasting in duration".

³⁶ The Greek verb translated "has been justified" is in the perfect tense, denoting an action that occurred in the past, with an effect that endures into the present.

³⁷ This truth is dogmatically denied by the Roman Catholic Church, which asserts that "the sacrifice of the mass is a perpetual immolation [i.e., death] of the [literal] Body of Christ".

- [11] The second step in the believer's sanctification is to "**reckon**". Many commentators have observed that Romans 6:11 contains the first command given in the epistle. What is true of Christ (v10), the believer is to "reckon" (i.e., count on, rely upon) as being true for him as well "through Jesus Christ, our Lord (i.e., the believer's identification/union with Him). Since through union with Christ a believer is "dead indeed [with reference] unto sin", he ought not "live any longer in it" (v2); similarly, through union with Christ a believer shares in His new (resurrection) life (Eph2:5-6), living "unto God".
- [12] Verse 11 logically leads to the negative imperative, "let not sin . . . reign in your mortal body". Our "mortal" (i.e., dying) bodies desire to "sin", but why should a believer give in to such desires which must shortly pass away? Christ said, "I do always those things that please [God the Father]" (Jn8:29); in union with Christ, this should be the believer's desire as well.
- [13] The first clause of v13 is a reiteration of v12 with more specificity. Sin is pictured as a sovereign, striving to "reign" over a believer's "body" and use it for "unrighteousness"; the believer must refuse to "yield" (i.e., submit) to it. Rather, believers who (in union with Christ) are "alive from the dead" should "yield yourselves unto God" as our sovereign, that He might use our "members" (i.e., bodies) as "instruments of righteousness" (cf. Rom12:1).

The third step in the believer's sanctification is to "**yield**". Just as faith was a non-meritorious action on the part of the individual in justification, "yield[ing] unto God" is an analogously non-meritorious action on the part of the believer in sanctification, which is why sanctification can also be said to be by faith (Cp., Gal3:3).

- [14] Note that the command to the regenerated and Spirit-indwelt³⁸ believer is not to strive to keep "the law" (any law). In the present dispensation of the grace of God (i.e., during the Church Age; Eph3:2), "grace" is the believer's rule of life, not "law" (Cp., 1Cor6:12).

NOT SLAVES OF SIN, BUT SLAVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

- [15] Paul returns to the question (v1) of what restrains sin in the life of the Christian? Since he asserted in v14 that the believer is "not under the law, but under grace", is he free to sin? "God forbid" (Greek **μὴ γένοιτο**, an impossibility; see discussion of this expression in the notes at Romans 3:4).

³⁸ The 5 ministries of the Holy Spirit unique to the Christian (regeneration, Tit3:5; indwelling, 1Cor3:16; sealing, Eph1:13; baptizing, 1Cor12:13; and potentially filling, commanded in Eph5:18), which were inoperative prior to the present Church Age, make possible for the first time a new way/rule of life for the believer. Sanctification for the Christian is succinctly summarized as, "Walk [by means of] the [Holy] Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal5:16). This also results from the believer's union with Christ, for "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (Jn3:34; cf. Is11:2).

- [16] A person who is the "servant" (Greek **δοῦλος**, 'bondslave'; i.e., a voluntary or willing slave) of "sin" will "obey" sin as his master. Likewise, the "servant" of God (v13) will obey Him, resulting in "righteousness"
- [17] Prior to our new birth, we were "servants of sin". But by "grace" (vv14-15) we have "obeyed from the heart" (i.e., believed) the "doctrine" (i.e., teaching [of the gospel]; cf. 1Cor15:1-4) we have heard. The obedience of faith demands first the hearing of the Word of God (cf. Rom10:17).
- [18] Our union with Christ through the new birth and Spirit baptism has "made us free from sin" as a sovereign or master, and now we are "servants" (i.e., willing slaves) of "righteousness". This is positional truth which must be manifested moment by moment in the life of the believer by "yield[ing] . . . unto God" (v13).
- [19] Paul alerts his readers to the fact that he is using an imperfect analogy. Comparing a believer's enslavement to "righteousness" (i.e., God) with his former enslavement to "sin" suffers from the fact that God does not put His children in bondage, as does sin. Nevertheless, much can be learned from even an imperfect analogy. One who willingly gives himself over to "uncleanness and iniquity" is a slave to sin, as one who willingly gives himself over to "righteousness" is a slave to God. Serving "righteousness" will result in "holiness", which in Greek is the same as the word for **sanctification**.
- [20] Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Luk16:13). "Sin" and "righteousness" are incompatible; they are mutually exclusive. They cannot both reign in the life of a believer.
- [21] The believer is now "ashamed" of the fact that he was formerly a servant of sin. There is no "fruit" that results from being a slave to sin. The "end" (Greek **τέλος**, 'purpose' or 'appointed result') of enslavement to sin is "death".
- [22] "But now" refers to the believers who have experienced the new birth and who are in union with Christ. We are "free from sin" as a master, becoming "servants" (i.e., willing slaves) "to God". The "fruit" that results from serving God is "righteousness", the "end" (Greek **τέλος**, 'purpose' or 'appointed result') of which is "everlasting life).
- [23] Paul summarizes Chapter 6 in this final verse. "Wages" (Lit. a soldier's pay) are remuneration paid for service rendered. Wages are earned and deserved. One who sins earns and deserves "death". Here, "death" is not merely physical death but the second death (Rev20:14), which is eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire. Since all have sinned (Rom3:23), all deserve an eternity in Hell.

In contrast, a "gift" (Greek **χάρισμα**, from the same root as 'grace') is antithetical to wages; it is unearned and undeserved. The "gift" God offers to anyone who believes is "eternal life". This "eternal life" comes "through Jesus Christ, our Lord"; the

believer's union with Christ ensures our spiritual new creation life now (v4) as well as our future bodily resurrection (1Cor15:20-23).

CHAPTER 7

PRACTICAL SANCTIFICATION

Whereas Romans 6 presented the right way of sanctification for the believer, Romans 7 illustrates the **wrong** way of sanctification. The Christian who has been justified by grace remains under grace (not law) as the rule for his life (Rom6:14; cf. Gal3:1-3). Romans 7 includes Paul's own experience of struggling to keep the law as a means of sanctification, which resulted in frustration (Rom7:15-25).

THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW

- [1] The question Paul raised in Romans 6:15 resulted in a brief parenthetical discussion (Rom6:15-23). Romans 7:1 returns to a consideration of the implications associated with the assertion made in Romans 6:14 that the believer is "not under the law".

In speaking to "them that know the law", Paul would seem to be addressing the Jews in the congregation. Although there is no article with the first use of "law" (i.e., those familiar with the principle of law in general), the second use is articulated; it seems clear that Paul is speaking to Jews concerning their intimate knowledge of "the law" (of Moses). The Jew under the Mosaic covenant was bound to keep every detail of the law "as long as he liveth" (i.e., until death).

- [2] As a specific example, Paul notes that as pertained to marriage, "the law . . . bound" a woman to her husband "as long as he liveth". However, a woman is "loosed" from the legal obligations of marriage "if the husband be dead"³⁹.
- [3] The demands of "the law" as pertain to marriage are inextricably linked to the life of a woman's husband. If a woman marries another "while her husband liveth", she is an "adulteress". However, she may marry another "if her husband be dead". A woman is made "free from the law [of marriage]" by death.
- [4] By analogy, Paul applies the illustration of marriage to the believer's relationship to the law. Christians' comprehensive union with Christ means that in Him we have passed through death. Thus, we "are become dead to the law" and are free "to be married to another". It is Christ (i.e., "him who is raised from the dead") whom we are now free to marry (Cp., 2Cor11:2; Eph5:30-32). Whatever demands "the law" had on us in our former life, they no longer apply to us in our new (marriage) life in Christ. We are freed from the legal obligations of our former marriage (to the law), but are now under the obligations of a new marriage (to Christ); namely, "that we should bring forth fruit unto God"

³⁹ This clause is a third-class condition in the Greek text, indicating a genuine possibility.

(where the use of the verb 'bear fruit' in the subjunctive mood indicates possibility, an expectation that may/may not be realized).

- [5] Before our new birth (i.e., "when we were in the flesh"), "the law" by its prohibitions inflamed "sinful passions" in us (Cp., Rom5:20; 7:7-8). The "fruit" that was "[brought] forth" in that condition was not "unto God" (the expectation of v4), but "death".
- [6] "But now" refers to the believer in union with Christ. The believer, "being dead", has been "delivered⁴⁰ from [obligations to] the law" as a rule of life or means of sanctification. Our "serv[ice]" (Greek verb δουλεύω, a cognate of δοῦλος, voluntary, perpetual enslavement) *should be* "in newness of spirit" rather than "oldness of the letter" (Cp., 2Cor3:6). Here, "the letter" undoubtedly refers to the written law (of Moses); the Christian's service (life) is no longer that of attempting to keep the law. Relative to the understanding of "spirit" in this verse, however, there is some ambiguity. It could mean either the regenerated human spirit received by the believer at the new birth, or it could be a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit. The first option is probably better considering the immediate context, since the subject of the indwelling Holy Spirit has not yet been raised in either Romans 6 or 7; it will be introduced as a major subject in Romans 8.

THE BELIEVER IS NOT SANCTIFIED BY THE LAW

- [7] Since Paul has argued that the law only served to increase sin (cf. Rom5:20), and that it is to be preferred that the believer be delivered from the law (cf. Rom7:6), he now asks a question that would seem to logically follow: "Is the law sin?". That is, if the law necessarily gives rise to sin, is it the source of sin and (thus) sinful itself? Paul immediately answers this question with "God forbid" (i.e., this is an absolute impossibility!). Rather, the law makes "known" (i.e., exposes) our sin nature (cf. Rom3:19-20).
- [8] Paul now uses his own experience as a universal illustration. Considering as an example the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" (Exod20:17; Deut5:21), he asserts that his very knowledge of this prohibition (of the heart) only served to increase his personal sin; that is, he coveted more after he understood that coveting was prohibited. Paul implies such a response is universal, which we implicitly know to be true.

When Paul says, "apart from the law sin is dead", he does not mean that there can be no sin without law (for he has previously taught that the Gentiles sinned "without law"; Rom2:12), but rather that it is the law that inflames man's sin nature (v5).

- [9] Still speaking of his own experience, Paul relates that he "was alive apart from the law once". He is speaking of his childhood,

⁴⁰ The verb translated "delivered" in Romans 7:6 was translated "destroyed" in Romans 6:6. In both instances it has the idea of 'do away with', 'annul', or 'render inoperative'.

before he understood the law (i.e., God's righteous demands; Cp., Isa7:16); he does not mean that he did not stand condemned before God as a child because of his ignorance of the law, but that he was ignorant of his own condemnation. But "when the commandment came" refers not to the giving of the Law at Sinai, but of Paul's personal consciousness of it. Consciousness of the law "revived" his own "sin [nature]" (v8), and with it came also knowledge of his condemned state before God (i.e., "[he] died").

- [10] In this way, the very "commandment" that was given for the purpose of living a righteous "life", rather led him down a path toward "death".⁴¹
- [11] The "sin [nature]" is activated by "the commandment" (i.e., law), "deceiv[ing]" and spiritually "sl[aying]" a man.
- [12] Paul makes clear that the problem of sin lies in the heart and nature of man. It does not reside in "the law" or any "commandment" from God. Indeed, "the law" is "holy, and just, and good".
- [13] Thus, the law was "good"; coming from God, it is not possible (Greek *μὴ γένοιτο*) that it could be inconsistent with His own "good" nature (Matt19:17). Nevertheless, "that which is good" (i.e., the law) was used by God as an instrument to expose our "sin [nature]"; indeed, to clearly reveal (to us) how "exceedingly sinful" it is. The idea is that without any commandment from God, we might be deceived in our own (fallen) minds into believing our "sin" natures are not that bad; but God, by giving (a multitude of) commandments, which we cannot keep, and which inflames our "sin" natures to break all the more, has rendered such self-deception untenable.
- [14] Paul concludes that "the law is spiritual", consistent with his previous characterization of it as "holy, and just, and good" (v12). There is no defect in the law. The defect is in that fact that Paul, representing all believers, is "carnal".

The 3 Classes of Men. In 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, Paul teaches that men may be classified in one of three ways: "natural" (2:14), "spiritual" (2:15-16), or "carnal" (3:1-3). The "natural" man is an unbeliever. The "spiritual" man is a believer in fellowship with God, walking by means of the Spirit (Rom8:1; Gal5:16) and yielding himself to God (Rom6:13). The "carnal" man is a *believer* who yields himself to his own sin nature (Rom7:14; 1Cor3:4-5). See the CHART: THE THREE MEN OF 1 COR. 2:14-3:3.

Paul's designation of himself here as "carnal" is extremely significant. He is speaking of himself as a believer; nevertheless, as a believer he still possesses a sin nature to which he can yield himself, which he describes as being "sold under sin".

⁴¹ This verse is **not** teaching that the "commandment" was given for the purpose of meriting eternal "life" (cf., Rom3:20); the context is that of the Law of Moses (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant), which promised the blessing of a long and prosperous *physical* "life" for obedience to it (Lev26:1-13; Deut28:1-14).

THE BELIEVER AND SIN

In Romans 7:14, Paul alluded to the possibility that as a believer he could be "carnal", yielding to his own sin nature rather than to God (Rom6:13). The remainder of this chapter (Rom7:15-25) relates Paul's experience as a "carnal" Christian.

[15] Paul asserts that he does not understand his own behavior. He does not do what he wants to do; that is, as a believer he desires to behave righteously, but he fails to do so. In fact, he finds himself doing the very (unrighteous) things that, as a believer, he "hates". Although some have suggested that this was Paul's experience as an unbeliever, this experience is markedly different from that of the unbeliever, who has no desire to behave righteously nor any hatred of his own unrighteousness.

Paul's Perspective in Romans 7:15-25. Paul's dilemma is the common experience of all believers on this side of the resurrection. We simultaneously possess two natures: 1) a new, regenerated spirit (i.e., the new man; Eph4:24) and, 2) an old sin nature. These two natures war with each other for control of the believer. Paul's discourse appears to be him, from the perspective of the new man, commenting on himself yielding to his old sin nature.

[16] Paul (i.e., the believer) agrees that God's law is "good" (Greek **καλός**, often rendered 'beautiful'), even as he willfully breaks it—something the unbeliever refuses to do.

[17] Paul is not trying to shirk personal responsibility for his sin, but he is sharply contrasting the incompatible desires of the two natures within the believer. The believer's new nature cannot sin (1Jn3:9), whereas his old sin nature is unable to refrain from sin (1Jn1:8).

[18] Jesus taught that for believers "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt26:41). A believer's old sin nature is more than his "flesh" (i.e., body); nonetheless, it is inextricably bound up with his mortal body⁴². Paul confesses that as a believer he desires to do "good" (in contrast to the unbeliever, who does not will to do good); his concern is not the desire for good, but "how to perform" (i.e., what is the means by which he may realize the personal sanctification he so desires?).

[19] Reiteration of verse 15.

[20] Reiteration of verse 17.

[21] When Paul says he finds a "law", he means he has discovered a principle that holds true in his (a believer's) life. When he "would do good", an "evil" that is "present [within him]" wars against that desire.

⁴² For this reason, a believer will never achieve perfect sanctification until he receives his new, glorified body at the resurrection.

- [22] Even so, he "delight[s] in the law of God after the inward man", where "inward man" is a description of the believer's new nature.
- [23] Here Paul describes the same war as being between the "law of [his] mind" (i.e., new nature) and the "law in [his] members" (i.e., old sin nature). Again, the sin nature is seen as being inextricably linked with a believer's physical body.
- [24] Paul's implicit confession is that he will never be able to deliver himself from this "wretched" condition (i.e., the carnal Christian). In exasperation, he cries out asking "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Again, although the sin nature is something more/distinct from one's physical "body", it cannot be extricated from it.
- [25] Paul answers his question (v24). It is "God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord" who is able to deliver the believer from his own sin nature, which will be the main subject expounded in Romans 8. As in v23, "mind" is used for the new nature, whereas "flesh" (i.e., body) is used for the old sin nature.

CHAPTER 8

ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION

Romans 7 concluded with Paul's experience as a carnal Christian, frustrated with the struggle to overcome his own sin nature (Rom7:14-25). This naturally gives rise to two questions. First, what resources are available to the Christian in this war against his own flesh. The amazing answer is the power of God the Holy Spirit⁴³ dwelling within the Christian. Second, is victory possible in this war? The answer is that not only is victory possible, it is assured (though not in this present life). Romans 8 begins with "no condemnation" by God (v1), the justification of the believer, and ends with "no separation" from God (vv35-39), the **security** of the believer. The security of the believer (i.e., his ultimate sanctification, glorification; Rom8:30) does not depend on personal victory over sin in the present, but on his position in Christ.

THE SPIRIT AND THE SIN NATURE

- [1] As a result of justification, in which God declares the believer righteous (Rom3:24-26), there is "now" (i.e., a present reality) "no condemnation" by God of anyone who is "in Christ Jesus". The phrase "in Christ Jesus" (or "in Christ") is a technical term of the N.T.⁴⁴, which denotes the Christian's union with Christ through Spirit baptism (1Cor12:13); all who are "in Christ" are a "new creation" (2Cor5:17), having experienced the new birth.
- [2] Here is the great contrast between sanctification in the N.T. versus the O.T. The "law" (meaning principle) of sanctification

⁴³ Although mentioned only once to this point in Romans (Rom5:5), the Holy Spirit is mentioned 19 times in Romans 8.

⁴⁴ Used primarily by Paul (76 times in his epistles), but also by Peter (1Pet3:16; 5:14).

in the N.T. is by means of "the [Holy] Spirit" (Gal5:16) who is the source "of life in Christ Jesus". Thus, the Christian is "free" (i.e., has been delivered; Rom7:6) from the Mosaic "law", the principle of sanctification in the O.T., which could only produce "sin and death".

- [3] In the O.T. period, it was not possible that "the law [of Moses]" could sanctify the believer. The law was merely God's righteous standard revealed. The "weak[ness]" of the law, which resulted in its failure to sanctify, did not reside in itself, but in the "flesh" (i.e., sin nature) of believers who could not keep it. Both "sin" and the "flesh" (i.e., sin nature) which produces it were "condemned" (i.e., judged) as part of the work of Christ (2Cor5:21), who came "in the likeness of sinful flesh". In His incarnation, Jesus Christ was/is genuinely and fully Man so that he is qualified to redeem men (Heb2:14-17), yet because of His supernatural virgin conception/birth (Luk1:35) His humanity is free of a sin nature (Heb4:15; 1Pet1:18-19).

Human Nature. The proverb, "To err is human, to forgive divine", is untrue. The certainty of sin (i.e., "to err") is only inevitable for fallen humanity. It is true of everyone naturally descended from Adam, because all men have inherited a sin nature from him (Gen5:3). It was not true of Adam before the fall (the creation of Adam by God was declared to be "very good"; Gen2:31), and Jesus Christ did not have to possess a sin nature in order to be genuinely human. In the resurrection, all believers will be free of a sin nature, yet genuinely human.

- [4] God's purpose in sanctification, which is "righteousness" (a life of holiness; cf. Lev11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 1Pet1:15-16), may be "fulfilled in us" (Christians, in whom dwells the Holy Spirit; v9) to the extent that we "walk . . . after the Spirit" (Cp., Gal5:16), in contrast to yielding to our own "flesh" (i.e., sin nature). In this verse, the Greek word translated "walk" is a present tense participle (lit., 'is walking'), indicative of a moment-by-moment, continuous act of volition on the part of the believer.
- [5] Here, "flesh" refers to that nature we receive when we are born (naturally; i.e., the sin nature), and "spirit" refers to that nature we receive when we are born again (i.e., the new nature). The sin nature desires sin; the new nature desires holiness. These two natures war against one another (Cp., Gal5:17) in the person of a believer. The believer is capable of "mind[ing]", or going "after", either of these two natures, which determines whether he is carnal or spiritual, respectively (cf. 1Cor2:15-3:4).
- [6] The destiny of the sin nature, or "flesh", is "death", whereas the destiny of the new nature, or "spirit", is "[eternal] life and peace". Even a believer can be "carnally minded", which is to allow his person to be controlled by the sin nature.
- [7] A "carnal" Christian is a believer at "enmity against God"; he is under the control of his sin nature and not "subject to [the standard of righteousness revealed in] the law of God".

- [8] It is impossible for the believer who is controlled by his sin nature to "please God".
- [9] However, the believer does not have to be under the control of his sin nature. If he is "not in the flesh" (i.e., controlled by his sin nature), but is rather "in the spirit" (i.e., controlled by his new nature, empowered by the "Spirit of God" who "dwell[s]" in him), he does indeed have the power to please God; this is the difference between the believer and the unbeliever. This verse makes clear that every genuine believer in the present age has "the Spirit of Christ" (i.e., the Holy Spirit) permanently dwelling in him—something that was not true for O.T. saints (Cp., Jn14:16-17).
- Note that the casual interchange between "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ" is an implicit assertion of the deity of Christ. The Holy Spirit can be characterized as either, since both the Father and the Son "send" Him to help believers during the present Church Age (Jn14:26; 16:7).
- [10] The "body" is "dead", or inevitably subject to death, because of sin (Rom6:23)—whether one is a believer or not. But "if Christ be in you" (i.e., for the believer), the Holy "Spirit" is given to impart "life because of righteousness" (i.e., the righteousness of Christ merited by His perfect human life imputed to the believer; 2Cor5:21).
- [11] Here is a promise of a future resurrection of the believer. Resurrection in the Bible always relates to "mortal" (i.e., physical) "bodies"; it is never used in a spiritual sense. The fact that the Holy "Spirit", who is credited with the resurrection of Jesus "from the dead", permanently indwells the believer today is a guarantee of His future resurrection of the believer's body (Cp., Eph1:13-14).
- [12] Thus, "brethren, we" (i.e., believers) are not bound to "live" under the control of our "flesh" (i.e., sin nature).
- [13] Living "through" (i.e., instrumentality; Cp., Gal5:16) "the [Holy] Spirit" is the means of sanctification of the Christian, by which he "[is putting to death] the deeds of the body" (i.e., with which the sin nature is inextricably linked). It is by means of the Spirit that the Christian "shall live" in fellowship with God (Col3:5-9).

THE BELIEVER A SON AND HEIR

- [14] In vv14-17, Paul is almost certainly making use of the distinction between "children" (v16) and "sons" (14) that was intrinsic to Roman culture. Children were (immutably) biologically related to their father, even as the believer is secure in his relationship to God through the new birth. Sonship, however, denoted a fellowship with the father in which the father was pleased with the son. Believers who are "led by [means of] the Spirit" (Cp., Gal5:16) are "sons".

- [15] In Roman culture, "adoption" was the ceremony by which a child (either biological or adopted) was formally accepted by a father as his "heir" (Cp., v17; cf. Gal4:1,7); not all biological children became heirs. "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "Father", though used in a much more intimate and personal way than the Greek **πατήρ**.
- [16] With the "[Holy] Spirit" permanently indwelling believers after the new birth, Christians are "children of God".
- [17] Two inheritances may be in view: 1) eternal life, a gift unquestionably promised to all believers, and 2) the privilege of reigning with Christ (in His millennial kingdom) promised for a life of faithfulness to Him. It is not clear that all believers are promised to "reign with him" (Cp., 2Tim2:11-12). The "sons of God" are to be "joint heirs with Christ" (i.e., they stand to inherit all that God has promised to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; Eph1:3).

THE PROMISE OF GLORIFICATION

- [18] In v17, reigning with Christ (in His future Millennial Kingdom) was conditioned upon suffering with Him in the present. Any amount/degree of "sufferings" experienced by believers during "this present time" is infinitely insignificant in comparison to "the glory" into which we will enter at the resurrection; our present "sufferings" are called "light" and "temporal" in comparison to a future "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2Cor4:17-18).
- [19] When man introduced sin into the world (Gen3:1-6; Rom5:12), the consequent judgment of God (i.e., the curse) impacted the entire universe (Gen3:14-19). In a similar way, the "manifestation [in glory] of the sons of God" (v14) will have a universal effect on "the creation" (Cp., Ps8:3-8).
- [20] The greatest act of so-called environmental desecration by man occurred when he introduced sin into the world. All "creation" (i.e., the universe) was "made subject to vanity" by God as a judgment of man's sin. The Greek word translated "vanity" can carry the idea of 'futility', 'frailty', or 'perversity' (cf. Eph4:17; 2Pet2:18). And yet, at the same time God judged the creation, He also provided the "hope" (i.e., prophetic expectation) of its redemption (Gen3:15).
- [21] A reversal of the "bondage of corruption" (i.e., certainty of decay, ruin, perishing), universally experienced by "the creation", is to be expected in association with the "glori[fication]" of the "children of God". This will begin in Christ's Millennial Kingdom and continue into eternity. The result of Christ's work of redemption goes far beyond the salvation of human souls; it includes redemption of the entire physical "creation" (Cp., Ps8:3-8).
- [22] The "whole creation" (i.e., entirety of the universe) is, and will remain, subject to "the bondage of corruption" (v21), "until" the deliverance that is promised to come.

- [23] The deliverance of "the whole creation" (v22) is connected to "the redemption of our body" (i.e., the resurrection of believers). Believers at present are said to "have the first fruits of the Spirit" in that a part of us has already experienced the "new creation" (2Cor5:17), which assures that the remainder of us (i.e., "our body") will experience it in the future (Cp., Eph1:13-14).
- [24] Our salvation was personally appropriated "by [means of] hope" (Cp., Eph2:8-9). Here "hope", which is a confident expectation that the promise of God will come to pass, is used as a synonym for faith (cf. Heb11:1). By definition, after the promise of God has been realized, there is no longer a role for faith/hope; faith/hope are operative before (in anticipation of) the promise of God has been fulfilled. This is the sense in which both faith and hope will pass away (Cp., 1Cor13:13).
- [25] As those who have believed in the Lord Jesus, Christians "hope" in God's promise of everlasting life and "wait for" a future resurrection of our bodies (cf. Jn6:40).
- [26] In this period, the present time of "suffer[ing]" with Christ (vv17-18) and "wait[ing] for" the resurrection of our bodies (v23) that will perfect our sanctification, we have been given "the [Holy] Spirit" to "help" us. As an example, He continually "maketh intercession for us" with God the Father⁴⁵, perfectly expressing our needs to Him in a way that even we cannot; this continuous intercession is necessary in light of the fact that "the accuser (i.e., Satan) [accuses us] before our God day and night" (Rev12:10).

Although some have suggested that these "groanings which cannot be uttered" refer to believers praying in unknown tongues, it is not the believer but rather the "Spirit" who is interceding in prayer, expressing in "groanings" needs that are impossible to put into words.

- [27] God the Father is the one who "searcheth the hearts". Though the intercession of God the Holy Spirit is made without words, the Father understands perfectly the "mind of the Spirit". Furthermore, God the Holy "Spirit" makes an "intercession for the saints" that is in perfect accord with "the will of God", which is the criterion God has said ensures our prayers will be heard and answered (1Jn5:14-15).
- [28] An equally valid (and preferred) translation of the Greek (TR) text of this verse could be:

"And we know that **He** [i.e., **God**; from v27] works together all things for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *His* purpose."

⁴⁵ As does the Lord Jesus Christ in His role as our High Priest (Heb7:25).

This verse is a classic expression of the Providence of God⁴⁶. The events that occur in the life of a Christian are not mere happenstance, nor are they outside of God's control. Rather, God actively works within His creation to ensure that, for "them that love God" and who are "the called according to His purpose" (i.e., believers), "all things" Christians experience are divinely orchestrated/engineered "for [their ultimate] good" (Cp., 1Cor2:9). There is no better illustration of this than Scripture's record of the life of Joseph (cf. Gen45:5-8; 50:20). In a way that is incomprehensible to finite creatures, God even orchestrates the freewill choices of men meant for evil to fulfill His good purposes in the lives of His children. Note that this promise is for believers alone; it does not encompass unbelievers.

- [29] Those "whom [God] did foreknow" (i.e., believers) are subjects of His "predestinat[ion]" (Cp., 1Pet1:2). Predestination is nothing more than a determination in advance of a destination or end point⁴⁷. The subjects of God's work of predestination were identified in v28 as "them that love God" (i.e., believers) and are "the called according to His purpose". God's purpose for them is that they "be conformed to the image of His Son". In this verse, predestination has to do with the believer's ultimate sanctification (i.e., to be exactly like Christ⁴⁸), not his justification (recall that the grand subject of Romans 6-8 is the sanctification of believers). God has predestinated believers to perfect sanctification in order to create a new race of perfect men (of which Christ is the "firstborn").

Foreknowledge and Predestination. Reformed Theology treats foreknowledge and predestination as virtually synonymous. The "elect" are those who are predestined to be saved *because* they were foreknown to God from the foundation of the world. In the Greek text, foreknowledge is **προγινώσκω** (the verb 'to know' with the prefix 'before'). Since the verb 'to know' can be used as a Hebrew idiom to imply an intimate knowledge (i.e., love, or even sexual relations; cf. Gen4:1; 19:5), it is asserted that God's foreknowledge of a believer is equivalent to a special **love** relationship with him from **before** the foundation of the world, implying his salvation was predetermined by God independent from (foreseen) personal faith. However, this is the etymological fallacy; although "know" is at times used in a way that implies love, the word "foreknow" is not used in that way. The Greek word **προγινώσκω** merely means "to have knowledge before hand". Foreknowledge and predestination should be distinguished; foreknowledge is an aspect of God's immutable attribute of omniscience, whereas predestination is a sovereign decree of God.

⁴⁶ The Providence of God is the personal and active, but unseen, work of God within His creation (Cp., Isa46:9-11). It is just as supernatural as the miracles of Jesus.

⁴⁷ Predestination is not determinism. In determinism, every chronological and/or logical step in a sequence is predetermined; determinism precludes freewill choices of creatures. In predestination, it is only the destination or end point that is predetermined; thus, predestination allows for freewill choices of creatures.

⁴⁸ Believers are made like Christ at the rapture/resurrection (1Cor15:51-53; 1Jn3:2).

- [30] This verse has been called by some **The Golden Chain**. It logically links together all those whom God "did predestinate", "called", "justified", and "glorified" (i.e., perfectly sanctified). The chain is tight and consistent; all who are predestinated will assuredly arrive at the final, divinely predetermined destination of perfect sanctification, described in v29 as being "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (v29), which is the glorification that will be completed when the believer receives his resurrection body (cf. 1Cor15:51-53; 1Jn3:2). See the CHART: **The Golden Chain of Romans 8:29-30**.

Where is sanctification? Note that missing from this logical sequence is any kind of pre-glorified *sanctification*. It is excluded since the believer's progressive sanctification in the present life lived in a mortal body is not an unconditional, sovereign work of God alone, but depends upon his moment-by-moment walk of faith (Cp., Gal5:16). Thus, sanctification of a believer prior to his glorification is not assured.

THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

- [31] Eternal security is implicit in the logical sequence of v30, as all who are "justified" will be "glorified". The believer's assurance of his absolute security is based on the sovereign decree of God (who has "predestinate[d believers] to be conformed to the image of His Son"; v29), and who/what can thwart the decree of God? Nothing!
- [32] God has already shown the length to which He will go to save us, in that He "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all". If God was willing to do that, there is no limit to what He is prepared to do to ensure our arrival at his predestined end (i.e., perfect sanctification).
- [33] God's "elect" are sinners. Satan incessantly accuses us (i.e., brings a formal, legal challenge) before God (Rev12:10), correctly pointing out that we have sinned even as he (whom God has condemned; cf. Matt25:41; Rev20:10). However, Satan's charge is moot, for God has justified the believer, and He has done so in a way that preserves His immutable attribute of righteousness (cf. Rom3:26).
- [34] Christ, the Son of God, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Rom4:25), continually intercedes for us (i.e., acts as our defense attorney; cf. 1Jn2:1) in this legal challenge brought by Satan (Cp., Heb7:25).
- [35] Verses 35-39 are a poetic, but exhaustive, litany of possible things that might come between us and the "love of Christ" in order to separate us from Him and prevent our ultimate sanctification. No manner of physical affliction, even resulting in death, can separate us from the "love of Christ".
- [36] Quotation of Psalm 44:22. The Lord Jesus reconfirmed this O.T. declaration when He promised His most faithful disciples that "in [this present] world ye shall have tribulation" (Jn16:33). For

the believer, "tribulation", "persecution", suffering, and death (i.e., martyrdom) are to be the expected norm; they are not to be taken as a sign that Christ has forsaken us (cf. Heb13:5).

- [37] In "all these things" believers are not defeated, but are "more than conquerors".
- [38] Included in the litany are "angels", "principalities", and "powers", which in the Bible refer to categories of spirit creatures (including Satan). Also included are all things that exist at the "present", as well as "things to come"; God, in His foreknowledge, knows all aspects of the future perfectly.
- [39] There is absolutely no aspect of "creation" that can separate the believer from "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". Note that it is God's, and Christ's, love for us (not our love for Him) that secures the bond (Cp., Jn10:28-30). This passage is the strongest assertion of the eternal security of the believer in the Bible. It allows for no uncertainty in the matter. The believer who does nothing more than put his faith in Jesus Christ, and Christ's work on his behalf (Rom3:24-26; Cp., 1Cor15:1-4), is saved by the grace of God—and that salvation can never be lost.

IV. THE WISDOM OF GOD REVEALED (Romans 9:1-11:36)

CHAPTER 9

ISRAEL, ELECTED IN THE PAST

Romans 9-11 are a parenthesis (in thought). Romans could have been a beautiful theological treatise with chs. 9-11 omitted⁴⁹. However, the Jew would immediately ask, "What about the national promises to Israel. If Jesus was/is the Messiah prophesied to come to the nation of Israel, why has the nation been set aside?" If Israel's election was according to grace (Rom11:5), totally apart from works (Deut7:6-9), and based on an unconditional covenant enacted by Jehovah Himself (Gen12:1-3; 15:7-21; Jer31:35-37), how can the nation now be 'rejected' by Him? If that people who were uniquely prepared by God over centuries for the coming of Messiah have failed to receive Him, has the purpose of God been frustrated? Such questions pose an apparent challenge to the faithfulness, integrity, and sovereignty of God, which (if not answered) calls into question the issue of personal salvation by grace, totally apart from works, which was the subject of Romans 1-8. Romans 9-11 reveals the resolution of this issue and a vindication of God relative to national Israel.

- [1] As the Apostle Paul opens this new section of the epistle addressing the issue of national Israel, he affirms the truthfulness of his testimony by the Mosaic requirement of two "witness[es]" (Deut19:15; a principle that also has a N.T. application, cf. 2Cor13:1): 1) his own "conscience", and 2) the "Holy Spirit" (Cp., 1Pet1:21).

⁴⁹ Numerous book-length commentaries, especially from Reformed writers, address only Romans 1-8.

- [2] The (present) rejection of national Israel for disobedience, a consequence under the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68), is a "great" and "heavy" burden that brings Paul "continual sorrow".
- [3] So much so that Paul (much like Moses before him; Cp., Exod32:31-32), expresses a willingness for his own personal damnation if it could facilitate the salvation of those who are his "kinsmen according to the flesh".
- [4] Note that the subjects of Paul's attention are "the Israelites", his blood relatives (v3) who are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (i.e., ethnic Jews). The Church is not in view in Romans 9-11, and the Church is not being addressed under the symbol of Israel.⁵⁰

Paul enumerates 7 unique privileges of "the Israelites". First, the "**adoption**" refers to guaranteed inheritance (cf. Gal4:1-7) and has to do with the Promised Land (Gen12:7; 13:14-15; 15:18-21). Second, the "**glory**" refers to the presence of God for guidance (Exod24:16), which eventually becomes associated with the Temple (2Chron7:1). Third, the "**covenants**"⁵¹, which established a formal relationship between Israel and Jehovah that forever puts an obligation on God relative to the nation of Israel (Jer31:35-37). Fourth, the "**giving of the law**" refers to the Mosaic covenant, which was a detailed revelation of the character of God, and which offered temporal blessing for national obedience (Lev26:3-15; Deut28:1-14). Fifth, the "**service of God**" refers to Israel's role in representing and making known Jehovah to all other peoples (Deut4:5-8), which would include the recording and preservation of Scripture (Cp., Rom3:1-2). Sixth, the "**promises**" . . .

- [5] "**whose are the fathers**" refers to the promises God gave to Abraham (Gen12:1-3) and reconfirmed with Isaac (Gen26:1-4) and Jacob (Gen35:11-12), which form the basis of His unconditional covenants made with Israel in order to effect their fulfillment. Seventh, the "**Christ**" (in Hebrew, Messiah) refers to Jesus, "of whom, concerning the flesh" was/is ethnically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (i.e., Jesus was/is a Jew).

Note that throughout Paul's enumeration of the privileges of "the Israelites" in vv4-5, he uniformly uses present tense verbs; these privileges, even during the present Church Age, belong to the Jewish people.

The Deity of Christ. The ending of Romans 9:5 is punctuated in several different ways in the English versions, some of which obscure or eliminate a powerful assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ that is clear in the Greek text. There is no punctuation of any kind in the Greek text (neither the traditional text nor the various critical texts; this is not an issue of variations in

⁵⁰ While the word "church" does not occur in Romans 9-11, "Israel", "Israelite", and "Israelites" occur 14 times. Furthermore, the term "Gentiles" is used 6 times in contradistinction to Israel (e.g., Rom9:24). It is clear that "Israel" is being used *ethnically*, not spiritually.

⁵¹ Here it is the unconditional Abrahamic covenant and associated Land, Davidic, and New sub-covenants that are in view.

the Greek text) within the phrase "who is over all God blessed forever"; this is a relative clause, the subject of which is "Christ". The Greek text clearly asserts that "Christ" is He "who is over all God". English versions that insert a comma, or even worse a period, which would seem to turn this final clause into a doxology that is disconnected from and unrelated to "Christ", do so with no support from the Greek text.

- [6] Yet, despite all the privileges enumerated in vv4-5, most Jews do not believe; this was true in Paul's day, and it is still true today. In light of this, Paul raises the issue of whether "the word of God" has failed. Here, he has in mind specifically "the word of God" spoken to Abraham (i.e., God's promise to Abraham; cf. Gen12:1-3), which eventuated in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen15:8-21). Paul implicitly responds in the negative. By asserting that "they are not all Israel, who are of Israel", Paul is saying that not every individual (physical) descendant of Abraham's was included in God's covenant with him.
- [7] God's promise to Abraham never suggested or implied that every individual descended from him would be saved, or is even included in the covenant. Paul's first illustration of this is Isaac, who was included in the covenant, while his elder brother Ismael was not (cf. Gen17:18-21; 21:12).
- [8] To be included in "the promise" God made to Abraham, physical descent from Abraham (i.e., "children of the flesh") was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition⁵². God's corporate "promise" to the descendants of Abraham expects/requires a faith-response for individual participation; even Abraham had to believe in order to be saved (cf. Gal3:6-7). The requirement for an individual faith-response does not make salvation incompatible with grace or election, nor does it make salvation partly by works (see Chart, RELATIONSHIP OF ELECTION AND FAITH).
- Furthermore, God actively exercised His sovereign, electing will among the descendants of Abraham to bring about the birth of Christ (v5), who is the pre-eminent "seed of Abraham"⁵³ (Gal3:16). This is illustrated in the accompanying Chart, ABRAHAM AND HIS (ELECT) SEED. Note that in the Chart, asterisks (*) indicate supernatural births; namely, Sarah's womb was dead (Gen18:11; Rom4:19), Rebekah was barren (Gen25:21), and Mary's conception of Jesus was a unique work of the Holy Spirit (Luk1:34-35).
- [9] Paul quotes Genesis 18:10. God's first choice among the seed of Abraham was of Isaac over Ismael. This sovereign choice was despite, 1) Abraham's own desire for Ishmael (cf. Gen17:18-21), and 2) the deadness of Sarah's womb, necessitating a supernatural conception (Gen18:11; Rom4:19). Note that this choice (i.e., election) has nothing to do with the personal salvation of Isaac, nor the personal damnation of Ishmael (indeed, God promised to bless Ishmael), but pertains solely to which individual was chosen

⁵² Physical descent from Abraham is necessary. Believing Gentiles in the Church today cannot be a party to the Abrahamic covenant for this reason.

⁵³ When used in the plural, the "seed" of Abraham refers corporately to all the physical descendants of Abraham (i.e., the nation of Israel); but when used in the singular, the "seed" of Abraham refers to Christ (Gal3:16).

to be a party to the covenant God made with Abraham (cf. Gen17:20-21).

- [10] God's second choice among the seed of Abraham was of Jacob over Esau, again despite Isaac's own desire for Esau (cf. Gen25:28; 27:1-4).
- [11] In this parenthetical phrase, Paul calls attention to the fact that God's "election" of Jacob over Esau was His sovereign choice. It was made before either child was born, so that it was "not [based on any] works" performed by either. Although the Reformed tradition (i.e., Calvinists) insists that this "election" pertains to the personal salvation of Jacob (and reprobation of Esau), the context of Romans 9 in no way supports such an assertion. Here, God's "election" has to do with His choice of Jacob (rather than Esau) for participation in the Abrahamic covenant, and especially Jacob's inclusion in the line of descent that will eventuate in the birth of Christ (v5; Cp., Gen28:12-14); this "election" has nothing to do with the personal salvation of either Jacob or Esau.
- [12] Paul quotes from Genesis 25:23 to demonstrate that God's choice of Jacob over Esau was made before either child was born. Genesis 25:23 begins with the LORD saying to the pregnant Rebekah, "Two **nations** are in thy womb, and two manner of **people** shall be born of thee..." In context, God is speaking of Jacob and Esau as heads of nations (i.e., Israel and Edom, respectively), not as individuals. The historical record indicates that the "elder" son, Esau, never personally "serve[d]" the "younger", Jacob, so this prophetic word of God cannot be a reference to Jacob and Esau as individuals.
- [13] Paul quotes from Malachi 1:2-3 where God says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated". Attempts at understanding this verse has caused Christians much consternation. This is complicated by the fact that Reformed Christians often link Romans 9:13 to 9:11, teaching that God's love/hatred for Jacob/Esau was sovereignly predetermined before either child had been born, and was not based on any of their works, in order to support their doctrine of Unconditional Election⁵⁴.

How is this verse to be properly understood? Three things should be considered. First, the context of Malachi 1:2-3 (as in Genesis 25:23) seems to naturally be a reference to Jacob and Esau as heads of nations, rather than individuals; this is seen by the fact that the narrative immediately switches from "Esau" to "Edom" in Malachi 1:4, and from "Jacob" to "Israel" in Malachi 1:5. As in Romans 9:12, Romans 9:13 almost certainly has nations (rather than individuals) in view. Second, note that this quotation from

⁵⁴ The Reformed doctrine of Unconditional Election "declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save... His eternal choice of particular sinners unto salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will. Thus election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do, but resulted entirely from God's self-determined purpose". (Steele and Thomas, The Five Points of Calvinism, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1963, p. 30)

Malachi 1:2-3 is a declaration of God made more than a millennia after the deaths of Jacob and Esau, **not** before their births. It was made approximately two centuries after God declared, by the mouth of the prophet Obadiah, His final judgment on the nation of Edom, specifically "for thy violence against thy brother, Jacob" (Obad1:10); so God's hatred of Edom (cf., Obad1:2) was based on the nation's works, not independent of them (cf. Ps5:5). Third, God's declaration in Malachi 1:2-3 is made in response to a (hypothetical) query from "Israel", asking Him "in what way hast thou loved us?" (Mal1:1-2). God's response may be relative in nature, rather than absolute, akin to when Jesus declared, "If any man come to me, and **hate** not his father, and mother, and wife... he cannot be my disciple" (Luk14:26); since God commands a man to love his father, mother, wife, etc., Jesus is clearly using "hate" in a relative sense (i.e., for a disciple, his love for Christ must be so great that his love for his own father, mother, wife will seem as hatred in comparison).

In conclusion, God's declared hatred for "Esau" is directed toward the nation of Edom, not Esau the individual, and it came after more than a millennia of wickedness on the part of Edom, especially its violence toward Israel (cf. Gen12:3). The great love God has for the nation of Israel, greatly exceeding His love for all other nations, is demonstrated by the fact that with Israel alone God entered into eternal and unconditional covenants that conferred to them unspeakable national privileges, the greatest of all being their role in bringing forth Christ (vv4-5).

GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN ELECTION

- [14] Since God exercises His sovereignty in election, choosing some (Isaac, Jacob) and not others (Ismael, Esau), does that make Him "unrighteous"? Paul answers this question as "God forbid" (in the Greek text, **μὴ γένοιτο**, expressing an impossibility; see discussion of this expression in the notes at Romans 3:4).
- [15] To further illustrate God's sovereignty in election, Paul quotes Exodus 33:19. Here, God makes clear to "Moses" that it is His divine prerogative to determine to whom He extends both "mercy" and "compassion" (in Exod33:19, translated "grace"). It must be understood that the concepts of both "mercy" and "grace" intrinsically concern recipients who are unworthy/undeserving of the favor extended. God is never obligated to show anyone "mercy" or "grace", so there cannot be "unrighteousness" in God if He withholds something that is undeserved. Furthermore, remember that the discussion of election in Romans 9 has nothing to do with personal salvation/damnation. Here, God's choice has to do with who will fulfill His purposes on earth, especially relative to revealing His character, recording His Word, and bringing forth Christ/Messiah (cf. vv4-5).
- [16] God sovereignly chooses who will receive His undeserved favor, not men. Remember, Abraham wanted Ismael to receive God's favor (but God chose Isaac), Isaac wanted Esau (but God chose Jacob), Jacob wanted Joseph (but God chose Judah), and David wanted Solomon (but God chose Nathan). No one would suggest that Joseph or Solomon

were unsaved; again, God's choice in Romans 9 does not pertain to personal salvation.

- [17] Another illustration of God's sovereignty in election was His choice of Pharaoh (and the nation of Egypt) as an instrument through whom He would display His divine "power", and through whom His "name might be declared throughout all the earth". Pharaoh (and Egypt) deserved judgment for his enslavement and persecution of the children of Israel (Exod1:8-22), which directly threatened the coming of Christ (Cp., Exod1:22).
- [18] God withheld His "mercy" from Pharaoh, choosing to righteously judge him (and the nation of Egypt) as a testimony to "all the earth" of His "power" (v17) to curse those who curse Israel (cf. Gen12:3). Pharaoh was not a forced or unwilling participant in this display of God's power; rather, he freely and repeatedly chose to "harden" his own heart against the will of God, clearly and supernaturally revealed to him, prior to God actively hardening Pharaoh's heart (i.e., judicially and irreversibly hardening him into a state of judgment). For a consideration of this from the text of Exodus, see the Chart: THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART.
- [19] There were those in Paul's day who portrayed God's sovereignty in election as a determinism that precludes human freewill⁵⁵ (see footnote 47, page 47). In the context of such an (unbiblical) view of election, God would be unrighteous in judging Pharaoh (or anyone), since Pharaoh's rebellion against God was sovereignly decreed by Him in advance, without the possibility of Pharaoh doing/choosing otherwise.
- [20] This verse is largely a quotation of Isaiah 29:16, a passage where God speaks of His decision to discipline Jerusalem/Judah. God is righteous, so by definition His decisions to judge must be righteous. For unrighteous creatures to call into question the righteousness of their holy Creator is unthinkable (Cp., Job9:32).
- [21] It is the prerogative of the "potter" (i.e., the Creator) to determine the purpose for which He molds the "clay" (i.e., the creature). From "the same lump", God can make either a "vessel" for "honor" (e.g., Jacob, Israel) or "dishonor" (Pharaoh, Egypt; Cp., 2Tim2:20).
- [22] In His revelation of Himself to His creation, God desired to "make known" both His "power" and "wrath" (i.e., righteous judgment). To accomplish this, He "endured with much long-suffering" creatures He had made that were "fitted to destruction". Here, the Greek verb translated "fitted" is in the perfect tense, middle voice, meaning the process of fitting (i.e., preparation) has been completed, and that the act of preparation was one in which the

⁵⁵ A determinism that precludes the possibility of freewill choices on the part of men is a pagan notion (not a Biblical one), embodied in the Greco-Roman concept of **fate**. Hector, the Trojan adversary of Achilles, reveals the pagan concept when he laments, "And fate? No one alive has ever escaped it, neither brave man nor coward, I tell you—it's born with us the day that we are born." In contrast to the deterministic, pagan worldview which necessarily gives rise to hopelessness on the part of men, the Biblical worldview exalts hope (Rom8:24-25).

recipient of the action performed the action on itself. The Greek text is clear, it is the "vessels of wrath" that prepared themselves for destruction! Why does God wait so long? God waits for rebellious creatures to complete their work of preparing themselves for His righteous judgment (Cp., Gen15:16). These creatures justly receive God's judgment for their willful sins. In His omniscience, God foreknows who will rebel against Him, but no predestinating decree of His causes their rebellion.

- [23] God also desires to "make known the riches of His glory", for which He creates "vessels of mercy". Since these creatures are recipients of "mercy", they are undeserving of it. These God "prepared" (here the Greek verb is in the active voice, so it is God who does the work of preparation) in advance (Rom8:29; Cp., Jn9:2-3).
- [24] By using the expression "even us", Paul categorizes himself and the recipients of this epistle (i.e., Christians in Rome), as "vessels of mercy" (v23) who have been effectually "called". And as the church(es) in Rome were at this time (c. 57 AD) largely Gentile, he introduces the increasingly obvious reality that in God's sovereign election, He has chosen some "Gentiles" to be among His "vessels of mercy", to be used in His purposes in history⁵⁶, in addition to the "Jews".

JEWES AND GENTILES IN THE PLAN OF GOD

- [25] Paul quotes Hosea 2:23. Although in context Hosea was speaking of the restoration of Israel following a time of discipline for national sin, the Holy Spirit leads the Apostle Paul to apply the principle expressed in this verse to the Gentiles. Gentiles were not corporately a "people" of God in the O.T., nor "beloved" in the sense of God's covenantal relationship with Israel, but a time would come when that would change (Cp., Act15:14). Though the idea of Gentiles as "vessels of mercy" was a notion that shocked 1st century Judaism (cf. Luk4:24-29), it had always been God's intention to include Gentiles in His plan and purposes for history.
- [26] Paul extends his application by quoting Hosea 1:10. Much more than merely chosen by God to play a role in His plan for history, "[Gentiles] shall be called the sons of the living God" (i.e., adopted into the family of God).
- [27] Now in vv27-28 Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22-23 relative to "Israel". His point is that of the multitude of Jews who comprise the nation of Israel, it is a relatively small "remnant" who are genuine believers that will be personally "saved" (consistent with Rom9:6).

⁵⁶ While this was true in the O.T. in a small measure, it is greatly magnified during the Church Age. Whereas the nation of Israel was composed primarily of Jews (allowing for a small number of Gentile believers to be incorporated into it as proselytes), the Church is comprised primarily of Gentiles (Cp., Act15:14) with only a small number of Jewish believers (Rom11:5).

- [28] Nevertheless, God's exercise of His sovereignty in election **always** includes a Jewish "remnant" (even in the present Church Age when national Israel has been set aside; cf. Rom11:5).
- [29] Quotation of Isaiah 1:9. In contrast to "Sodom" and "Gomorrah", who were peoples utterly eradicated by God's judgment of them, God's judgment of the nation of Israel was such that He intentionally preserved a "seed" (i.e., remnant) that will allow for their eventual restoration as a people/nation.
- Note on the Lord of Sabaoth. "Sabaoth" appears in this verse as an untranslated word. It is transliterated from the Greek into English, but it appears in the Greek text as a transliteration from the Hebrew of Isaiah 1:9. It has the meaning of 'armies' and appears throughout the O.T. in the phrase commonly translated as "the LORD of hosts".
- [30] Believing "Gentiles", entirely apart from the Law or any of the privileges enumerated in vv4-5 that were extended to the nation of Israel, "attained to righteousness" (i.e., acceptance by God) by means of "faith" alone (Cp., Rom4:5).
- [31] In contrast, the vast majority of Jews who comprised the nation of "Israel", with all its advantages, have not "[attained to] righteousness" (i.e., acceptance by God).
- [32] Why? Because a majority of Jews in Israel "sought" righteousness (i.e., acceptance by God) by means of "law" rather than "faith" (Cp. Rom3:20; Eph2:8-9; Tit3:5). Indeed, when in the consummation of O.T. history the greatest test of "faith" came, namely, to receive and accept the Messiah for which the nation of Israel had been uniquely prepared for more than a millennia, most Jews "stumbled at that stumbling stone".
- [33] This verse is an amalgamation of Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14-15, and Isaiah 28:16. The "stumbling stone" is Messiah (note personal pronoun "him"), the Lord Jesus Christ. After His coming, acceptance of Jesus Christ becomes the ultimate object of "faith", upon which an individual's acceptance by God depends. Use of the universal pronoun "whosoever" indicates that acceptance by God is available to all who "believeth on [Christ]", irrespective of whether one is a Jew or a Gentile (v24).

CHAPTER 10

ISRAEL, REJECTED IN THE PRESENT

Whereas Romans 9 focused on the fact of Israel's election in the past (as God's chosen instrument for revelation and blessing to the whole world), Romans 10 turns to the reality of Israel's national rejection in the present (i.e., during the Church Age) as discipline for rebellion, specifically for the nation's rejection of Christ at His first coming (cf. Matt23:37-39; Luk19:41-44; 21:20-24).

- [1] Similar to his opening lament in Romans 9:1-3, Paul begins Romans 10 by forcefully expressing that it is his "heart's desire" and continual "prayer" that "Israel . . . might be saved". Although

Paul was called to be God's apostle to the Gentiles (Act28:25-28; Gal2:8) and lay the foundation for the predominantly Gentile Church (Eph2:14-22), he was no anti-Semite; he loved Israel and desired the salvation of his people, the Jews.

Refutation of Replacement Theology. This verse alone refutes the defining tenet of so-called Replacement Theology (a.k.a. Supersessionism) that asserts that the Church is the new or true Israel (rather than ethnic Jews)—if the Church, made up of all who have believed on Jesus Christ, is now "Israel", why would Paul be praying for Israel's salvation?

- [2] Sincere faith is not sufficient; faith must be in accord with "knowledge" (i.e., truth). Unbelieving Israel had a "zeal for God", but not according to the truth. Namely, they denied that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (cf. Jn10:30-36), and genuine faith in God (the Father) requires faith in His Son as well (1Jn2:23; 5:1; cf. Jn4:23-24; 5:22-23; Act4:12).
- [3] Rather than simply receiving by faith God's offer of Christ's "righteousness" (imputed to them), Israel attempted to "establish their own righteousness" my means of keeping the Law (cf. Rom3:21-28; Cp., Matt5:20). In doing so, Israel is said to be "ignorant of God's [standard of] righteousness", since the righteous standard of God cannot be met by "deeds of the law" (Rom3:20).
- [4] The Greek word translated "end" is **τέλος**, which can mean either 'end' or 'goal, purpose'. The life of "Christ" perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of "the law [of Moses]", and "every one that believeth" is the recipient of Christ's righteousness imputed to them (Rom3:22). With the death of Christ, Israel⁵⁷ is no longer under the Law (cf. Rom7:1-6).
- [5] The Law [of Moses] was only a blessing to the one who kept it, which (excepting Christ) was no one. The Law as a standard of righteousness was a unit or an integrated, indivisible whole; to keep it was to fulfill every provision of it (Cp., Jas2:10).
- [6] In contrast, God offers all men a righteousness that comes not on the condition of human performance, but by "faith" alone.
- [7] The issue of "ascend[ing] into heaven" (v6) and "descend[ing] into the deep" is an allusion to Proverbs 30:4 (also quoted in John 3:13). The idea is that God's requirement for acceptance by Him is not a monumental, herculean human work that is impossible for mere men to achieve.
- [8] Rather, God's requirement is nothing more than "faith" in the message "preach[ed]" by the Apostle Paul (i.e., the gospel; cf. 1Cor15:1-4). In this verse Paul alludes to Deuteronomy 30:11-14, suggesting that righteousness by means of "faith" has always been

⁵⁷ The grand subject in Romans 9-11 is the nation of Israel. Israel was formerly under the Mosaic covenant and obligated to keep the Law, but that is no longer the case since the death of Christ (Gal3:24-25). In contrast, the Gentile nations were never a party to the Mosaic covenant, nor under the Law [of Moses].

God's requirement for acceptance, even when the nation of Israel was under the requirements of the Mosaic covenant.

- [9] God's acceptance (i.e., salvation) is conditioned upon genuine belief in: 1) the Person of "the Lord Jesus" (i.e., the divinity of Christ; cf. Jn8:24), and 2) the work of Christ on our behalf; that is, Christ's resurrection (Cp., 1Cor15:14,17), which presupposes His death for ours sins (1Cor15:3-4). This message is what Paul designates as "the gospel" in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Note that mere "confess[ion]" is not sufficient, as one must also "believe in thine heart".
- [10] As in the case of Abraham, God reckons belief in the gospel as "righteousness" (Cp., Rom4:3), which results in the "salvation" of the believer. Here, "confession" and "belie[f]" are not two separate, sequential steps in a "salvation" process, but are both logically and chronologically simultaneous.
- [11] Paul again quotes a portion of Isaiah 28:16 (also Rom9:33), which refers to "believ[ing]" on Messiah, but changes the original pronoun "he" used in Isaiah to the Greek "whoever", emphasizing that salvation by faith is available to all.
- [12] The requirement for salvation (i.e., faith in the Person and work of Christ) is the same for both "the Jew and the Greek" (i.e., everyone).
- [13] Finally, Paul quotes from Joel 2:32, again emphasizing the universality of salvation by faith alone.

THE WORLDWIDE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (FOR ISRAEL)

- [14] The "they" in verses 14-18 refers to the nation of Israel (Cp., Rom10:19,21). Remember how Paul opened Romans 10; his concern for Israel is "that they might be saved" (v1). If Israel is to be saved, they must hear and believe the gospel (v9), which means that someone (i.e., a "preacher"; Lit., a herald) must share it with them.
- [15] Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7 where the messenger that brings good news is said to have "beautiful . . . feet", applying it to the one who would "preach the gospel" to the nation of Israel.
- [16] The present reality, however, is that the greater majority of Israel has not "believed" the "gospel"⁵⁸. To illustrate that this negative reception of Messiah by Israel was not unexpected by God, Paul quotes from Isaiah 53:1.
- [17] Saving "faith", for either Jew or Gentile, can only come through "hearing . . . the word of God". Thus, Paul always placed priority on the preaching of the word (cf. 2Tim4:2).
- [18] But someone might ask, has not Israel already "heard" the gospel proclaimed? "Yes"! The issue is not that Israel has not heard

⁵⁸ Of course, the greater majority of Gentiles have also rejected the gospel, but Paul's concern in Romans 10 centers on the Jews.

(Paul quotes from Psalm 19:4 which proclaims the universality of God's testimony of Himself), but that they have not believed.

- [19] Again, someone might ask, since "Israel" has heard the gospel, have they failed to "know" (i.e., understand) the message? No, Israel has understood the message. Thus, God must (and will) do more to reach "Israel". Paul quotes from the prophetic Song of Moses (Deut32:21) to reveal that God intends to break through the stubborn heart of Israel by "provok[ing them] to jealousy by them that are no people [of God]..." That is, while Israel is in a state of rebellion against Jesus the Messiah, God will bless the Gentiles (who have believed in Jesus the Messiah) so abundantly that Israel will eventually jealously desire the same blessing.
- [20] Paul quotes from Isaiah 65:1, where God prophesies that the Gentiles, who were/are not a favored nation as was Israel, would come in large numbers to the Lord.
- [21] Paul continues by quoting from Isaiah 65:2, indicating that God continues to call His "people" Israel to respond. Jesus also alluded to this verse from Isaiah 65:2, asserting that Israel will not be accepted again by God until they call upon Him (cf. Matt23:37-39).

CHAPTER 11

ISRAEL, ACCEPTED IN THE FUTURE

Whereas Romans 9 focused on the fact of Israel's election in the past (i.e., before the first coming of Christ), and Romans 10 focused on the reality of Israel's national rejection in the present (i.e., during the Church Age), Romans 11 looks prophetically to the future when Israel as a nation will repent of its rejection of Christ (Zech12:10-14)), call upon Him as Messiah and King to return (Hos5:15-6:2; Matt23:39), so that "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom11:26).

ALWAYS A REMNANT OF JEWISH BELIEVERS

- [1] Paul asks and answers an important question⁵⁹. One cannot conclude that God has "cast away His people" (the Jewish nation), since the Paul himself is and "Israelite, of the seed of Abraham". O.T. scripture makes clear that this cannot happen (cf. 2Sam7:24; Ps94:14; Jer30:11; 31:36-37; 46:28).
- [2] Paul directly and forcefully asserts that "God hath not cast away His people", and he links this to the foreknowledge (i.e., election) of God. Paul will make clear later in this chapter that God's election of Israel is irrevocable (cf. Rom11:28-29).

⁵⁹ This issue is still hotly debated within professing Christianity today. **Replacement Theology** (a.k.a. **Supersessionism**), contrary to the clear teaching of Romans 11, asserts that God's plan/purpose for national Israel ended with the nation's rejection of Christ (at His first coming), and that it has been transferred to the Church forevermore: the Church has *replaced* (or *superseded*) Israel. God forbid!

- [3] As an illustration of a similar time in the past when it appeared as if God had forsaken the nation of Israel, Paul points to the days of "Elijah" when King Ahab/Jezebel had killed all of the Lord's "prophets" save Elijah, and they sought to kill him as well. Elijah believed he was the only living Jew who remained faithful to the God of Israel (1Kgs19:1,14).
- [4] God corrected Elijah's misconception, pointing out that in addition to himself there were "seven thousand men" who remained faithful (1Kgs19:18). Admittedly, a mere seven thousand believers was a very small fraction of the nation of Israel in Elijah's day; the point, however, is that the fraction of believers within Israel **will never be zero** (Rom9:29).
- [5] Even "at this present time" (i.e., during the Church Age), there will always be a "remnant" of Jewish believers. The small number of Jewish believers during the present age are incorporated into the Church (cf. Eph2:14-17; 3:1-12), which will be raptured before the Tribulation (i.e., Daniel's 70th Week; Dan9:27; Rev6-19); it is for this reason that at the very beginning of the Tribulation period, God repopulates the world with a believing Jewish remnant (Rev7:1-8).
- [6] A believing Jewish remnant, at any point in history past, present, or future, persists "according to the election of grace" (v5). Here Paul reiterates that "grace" is incompatible with "works", whereas he has already asserted that "grace" is totally compatible with faith (Rom4:4-5,16). The "election" of the Jewish remnant, though it is "according to . . . grace", is still dependent upon personal faith (see Chart, RELATIONSHIP OF ELECTION AND FAITH).

NATIONAL ISRAEL (TEMPORARILY) SET ASIDE, NOT CAST AWAY

- [7] Though Israel was uniquely prepared by God (over a period of approximately 1,500 years) to recognize/receive Christ at His (first) coming, as a nation Israel failed to do so⁶⁰. Whereas "the election" believed (e.g., Paul, the apostles, Jewish believers in the Book of Acts, etc.), the majority of Jews "were blinded" as a judgment for their willful rejection of Christ (Cp., Luk19:42), analogous to God hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Rom9:18).
- [8] Quotation from Deuteronomy 29:4, where the context is God's judgment of the generation of Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Although that generation had witnessed a multitude of supernatural signs and miracles associated with their deliverance from Egypt, they failed to fulfill God's purpose for them (i.e., to enter the Promised Land); as a divine judgment, the opportunity for that generation of Israelites to enter the Land was withdrawn (even though they subsequently repented and desired to do so; Num14:39-45).

⁶⁰ Obviously Jesus had numerous disciples who received Him as Messiah and Lord, and who even wanted to make Him king. These individuals comprised the believing Jewish remnant in Jesus' day. However, God's expectation/requirement was that the nation of Israel "set *him* king over thee whom the LORD thy God shall choose" (Deut17:15), which in an ultimate sense was to be God's Messiah and Son (cf. Psalm 2).

- [10] Verses 9-10 are a quotation from Psalm 69:22-23, an imprecatory prayer of "David" against a nation of Israel that has turned against him in rebellion.
- [11] Paul asks whether the "stumbl[ing]" of Israel, meaning their current state of unbelief and resulting divine discipline, will result in their "fall" (i.e., permanent rebellion and ultimate judgment of God). His answer is "God forbid" (i.e., impossible!). God is using the stumbling of Israel during the present age to accomplish two purposes: 1) to extend "salvation" to the "Gentiles" (cf. Act15:14), and 2) use the salvation and blessing of God on the Gentiles to "provoke [Israel] to jealousy".
- [12] Paul notes that if the "fall" of Israel in the plan of God and the present "diminishing" of that elect nation during the present age can be used by Him for good (i.e., bring riches to the Gentiles and the whole world), imagine "how much more their fullness?" By this Paul means that the Gentiles ought to desire the restoration of Israel, since even more good should be expected (for the Gentiles and the whole world) with the nation of Israel in right relationship with the LORD.
- [13] At this point in the epistle Paul is specifically addressing "Gentiles" as his audience, writing to them authoritatively as "the apostle [sent to] the Gentiles" (Cp., Rom15:16; Gal2:8). His concern is how Gentiles view the present condition of the nation of Israel (i.e., their having been temporarily set aside in the plan of God).
- [14] Paul has embraced with fervor his calling from God to take the gospel to the Gentiles, since he hopes that his success in ministering to the Gentiles will be used by God to "provoke to jealousy" and "save some of" the Jews.
- [15] In this verse, the Greek word translated "casting away" is entirely different from the one similarly translated in Romans 11:1. In verse 1, the Greek word connotes a 'final rejection', whereas in this verse the meaning is more of 'setting aside because of a lack of usefulness' (but without implied finality).

Paul uses an argument from the lesser to the greater. If the present "casting away" of the nation of Israel (a bad thing) has resulted in something very good (i.e., "the reconciling of the world"), how much good/blessing is to be expected from "the receiving" of the nation of Israel back into fellowship with God? The implied answer is that something even better would result.

METAPHOR: OLIVE TREE WITH NATURAL AND WILD BRANCHES

- [16] Paul introduces two metaphors: 1) the "first fruit" defines the character of the "lump", and 2) the "root" of a tree (which forms first) defines the character of the "branches". Applying this to the nation of Israel, it is the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who came first (e.g., they are the "first fruit" or the "root"); their character and resultant relationship with the LORD defines that of the nation that comes from them (even more so because of the unconditional covenants God made with them

concerning their descendants). This reinforces Paul's assertion that the "casting away" of the nation of Israel must be temporary, since "holy" (i.e., righteous) "first fruit" must result in a good "lump", and a holy "root" must produce good "branches" (Cp., Matt7:17-18; Luk6:43).

- [17] Paul begins an extended illustration using the metaphor of the "root" and "branches" (of an "olive tree") introduced in v16. The "root" of the "olive tree" is the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (in relationship with the LORD because of the unconditional covenants He made with them; cf. Rom9:4-5). The natural "branches" are the Jews descended from the patriarchs, and the "wild" branches are the Gentiles. By analogy, nourishment and blessing come to "branches" only by means of the "root".

Note, "some of the [natural] branches" may be "broken off" for rebellion/unbelief, but never all of them; there will always be a believing remnant of Jews receiving the blessing of God (Rom9:29; 11:5). However, the breaking off of "some" of the natural "branches" allows for a "graft[ing] in among them" of some number of "wild" branches. In this way, the "fatness of the olive tree" (i.e., the blessing of God) can be extended to Gentiles; note, however, that the blessing of God comes to these Gentiles by means of the unconditional covenants God made with the Jewish patriarchs (cf. Gen12:2-3; Cp., Eph2:11-12).

- [18] For this reason, Gentiles have no cause to "boast" over/against the Jews, since their current condition of blessing from God comes through the Jewish patriarchs (i.e., the "root").
- [19] Furthermore, the Gentiles are not to think that God broke off natural "branches" for the purpose of making room to "graft in" wild branches, as if God preferred the Gentiles over the Jews.
- [20] It was not God's desire to break off any natural branches (cf. Ezek18:23,32; 2Pet3:9), He did so because of "unbelief" on the part of some Jews; in contrast, the Gentiles occupy their current condition of blessing because of "faith" (not works, so there is no cause for boasting; Eph2:9).
- [21] This realization should strike "fear" (v20) in the Gentiles, for if God "spared not the natural branches" (i.e., Jews) for unbelief, neither will He spare unbelieving Gentiles.

Some have used this verse to assert that a believer can lose his salvation; this is not the proper understanding of this verse. Note that in this extended metaphor, Jews and Gentiles are being treated corporately. The "natural branches" represent all Jews, and the wild branches represent all Gentiles. The "natural branches" that were broken off (v17) were individual Jews who did not believe (v20), not Jews who had once believed. Similarly, the (corporate) warning to Gentiles is that individuals among them will also be broken off (removed from the blessing of God) for unbelief. The unconditional promises God made to the nation of Israel did not ensure the salvation of any individual Jew (apart from faith); likewise, God's current work of blessing among Gentiles (Act15:14) does not ensure the salvation of any individual Gentile (apart from faith).

- [22] God displays His attributes both of "goodness" and "severity" (i.e., justice). Goodness, by means of grace/mercy, toward the Gentiles who believe, severity toward the Jews who did not believe. However, the "goodness" of God toward the Gentiles is contingent upon "continue[d]" faith (i.e., corporately, Gentiles must continue to believe), else they will be "cut off" even as unbelieving Jews were.
- [23] In contrast, even as God was able to "graft in" Gentiles (after they came to Jehovah in faith), so God can "graft [Israel] in again" if they will turn from their "unbelief". In this verse, Paul returns again to his theme that Israel's current condition of being outside the blessing of God is temporary.
- [24] It is much more "natural" for Israel to receive blessing from God, since they are party to the unconditional covenants God made with them. It is less "natural" for Gentiles, since their blessing from God must come indirectly as provisions in covenants God made with the Jewish descendants of Abraham (cf. Gen12:3).

ISRAEL'S FUTURE SALVATION

- [25] Paul is very concerned that his (predominantly) Gentile audience understand a "mystery" (i.e., information that can only be known by revelation, and which God chose not to reveal until the N.T.; Cp., Rom16:25-26; Eph3:3-5). Israel's present (national) rebellion against God and His Son/Messiah (i.e., Jesus Christ) is due to a judicial "blindness", which God is using for the purpose of building the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ (Eph1:22-23; 5:25-32), composed primarily⁶¹ of Gentiles (cf. Matt16:18; Act15:14 Rom11:7-11). Once the "fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (i.e., the Church is complete in number of individuals), Israel's judicial "blindness" will be removed. Failure to properly understand this truth tends to lead inappropriately to Gentile "conceit" (i.e., pride in one's own worth or goodness) relative to the Jewish people.
- [26] After Israel's judicial blindness is removed "all Israel shall be saved", by which is meant that all living Jews representing the nation of Israel at that time will both individually and collectively believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and call upon Him for deliverance. Those Jews that do believe on Christ will do so of their own free volition; however, many Jews even of that generation will refuse to do so, and they will perish in the judgments of the Tribulation (cf. Ezek20:33-38; Zech13:8-9 reveals that two-thirds of the Jews will perish, and one-third will turn to the LORD), so that the nation of Israel at the end of the 7-year Tribulation period will be comprised entirely of believing, regenerate Jews.

⁶¹ The fact that the predominantly Gentile Church includes the small Jewish remnant of the present age is reflected by the fact that: 1) only "some" of the natural branches are broken off in the olive tree metaphor of Romans 11:16-24, and 2) Israel's present "blindness" is said to be only "in part" (Rom11:25).

- [27] It is the unconditional new "covenant", made by God with the nation of Israel (Jer31:31), and made efficacious by the sacrifice of Christ (Matt26:28; cf. Heb9:1-28), that provides for the forgiveness of sins (Jer31:33-34).
- [28] During the present Church age, unbelieving Jews are "enemies" of the "gospel". Nevertheless, God's "election" of the nation of Israel for His purposes, both past and future, remains sure because of His promises to the "fathers" (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; cf. Gen12:1-3; Deut4:31).
- [29] The "gifts and calling of God" are irrevocable. The "gifts" of God are embodied in the promises and provisions of the unconditional covenants God has made with the nation of Israel (i.e., Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants). The "calling" of God is a reference to Israel's national election (e.g., Exod19:5-6; though this reference occurs during the giving of the conditional Mosaic Covenant, it highlights Israel's unique, national relationship with Jehovah).
- [30] In "times past" (i.e., the O.T.) Gentiles were unbelievers, "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph2:11-12), but have now "obtained mercy" through faith in the Jewish Messiah as a result of Israel's "unbelief".
- [31] Nevertheless, God will use His "mercy" shown to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (v11), resulting in "mercy" for Israel upon her own belief.
- [32] Since "all" (both Jew and Gentile) have fallen short of God's perfect standard of righteousness (Rom3:23) and deserve eternal judgment (Rom6:23), He offers "mercy" to "all". None will be saved by merit, but only by the grace of God appropriated through personal faith (Eph2:8-9).

DOXOLOGY

- [33] The plan and purpose of God, especially as it concerns the nation of Israel, represents incomprehensive "wisdom" and "knowledge". The "judgments" of the Creator cannot even be called into question by His creatures.
- [34] As was pointed out to Job, no creature can know (i.e., understand) the mind of the Creator (Job38:1-40:2), so it is impossible for us to give Him counsel. This is Paul's allusion to the Creator-creature distinction that is always and forever maintained throughout God's creation.
- [35] Furthermore, we have given God nothing, so He cannot be in our debt. The reverse is true; everything we have is a gift from God (1Cor4:7).
- [36] The concept expressed in this verse gives rise to the Latin phrase *Soli Deo Gloria* (i.e., glory to God alone). The glory of God is the purpose and goal of all history.

**V. THE WILL OF GOD REVEALED
(Romans 12:1-15:33)**

CHAPTER 12

In a pattern also exhibited in other epistles of Paul (e.g., Ephesians, Colossians), Romans opens with a doctrinal discourse (Romans 1-11) and concludes with a section of application/exhortation (Romans 12-16). Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not unrelated for Paul; he expects that a thorough knowledge and understanding of doctrinal truth will motivate a transformation in the life of a believer.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

- [1] Paul's language is one of exhortation; he pleads with the believer (i.e., "I beseech you, therefore, brethren") to allow a knowledge of the preceding doctrinal truth to impact his life (i.e., practical, progressive sanctification), consistent with the fact that such transformation is not a certainty, but requires a moment-by-moment yielding of the believer's will to God (Rom6:13). The basis of the changed life is "[because of] the mercies of God", or the faith-grace-mercy basis (in contrast to works) of the saving gospel of Christ (Rom1:16). That is, because of all that God has done for us, it is only "reasonable" that we would voluntarily serve⁶² Him out of gratitude. Christ's "service" for us was consummated in a sacrifice of His life (Matt20:28; Mk10:45), which resulted in His death. Our "service" for God is to be a "living sacrifice" in which our "bodies" (i.e., our entire lives) are "present[ed]" to Him for His use. The Lord Jesus' own prayer to the Father, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luk22:42), should be the believer's attitude in all things.
- [2] God never tempts a person to sin (Jas1:13). The temptation to sin originates from three different sources: the "world", the flesh, and the devil. The believer is instructed to overcome them in three different ways. He is to "flee" from sins of the flesh (cf. 1Cor6:18; 10:14; 1Tim6:11; 2Tim2:22), but he is to "resist the devil" (Jas4:7). Sins of the "world", as indicated in this verse, are overcome by a "transform[ation]" and "renewing of your mind". In other words, we must view and understand the "world" as God made it and has revealed it, as it truly is—not as fallen man in his sin and rebellion against his Creator has attempted to recast it (cf. Rom1:18-23). To accept sinful man's work of recasting⁶³ is to be "conformed to this world".

A Biblical Worldview. Man is called to understand the world, and absolutely *everything* in it, exactly as God has revealed it in the Bible (cf. 2Cor10:3-5); anything less than this, whether practiced by an unbeliever or a believer, is idolatry (Rom1:21-23).

⁶² Although many modern versions render "service" as *worship*, the Greek word has to do with labor performed for another without any religious connotation.

⁶³ For example, sinful man recasts the creation of the universe with the Big Bang theory, and the origin of man with the Theory of Evolution, both godless idols substituted for revealed works of God. For the Christian to compromise with such notions is for him to be "conformed to this world".

Only with a "transformed" and "renewed mind", and consistently exercising a **Biblical Worldview**, is it possible for the believer to "[discern] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God".

- [3] Human nature is a central target for recasting by sinful men, who would have us believe that humans are inherently good and capable of limitless, righteous accomplishments irrespective of the existence of God or His work on our behalf. Paul reminds the believer "not to think of himself more highly than he ought"; rather, he should "think . . . as God" (i.e., apply a Biblical Worldview) about all of humanity, which has "sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom3:23).
- [4] Whereas man's recasting of human nature assumes an equality of both ability and purpose (i.e., egalitarianism), God has revealed that not all "members" [of the "body" of Christ] are called to the same "office" (i.e., role).
- [5] Paul's subject has turned specifically to the church⁶⁴, which is the "body [of Christ]" (cf. Eph1:22-23; Col1:18). Though the church has "many" individual members, it is "one body". Consistent with the analogy, as not all members of the natural body have the same role or purpose, yet all are necessary to complete the body, so also for members in the church.
- [6] Different spiritual "gifts" are given to individual believers "according to . . . grace" (i.e., the gifts given, and to whom, are the prerogative of the Holy Spirit; cf. 1 Cor12:4-11). What follows is not an exhaustive enumeration of what spiritual "gifts" are available, but a representative list: "prophecy", "ministry" (or service; v7), "teaching" (v7), "exhortation" (v8), "giv[ing]" (v8), "rul[ing]" (v8), "mercy" (v8).
- [8] Paul's purpose in this abbreviated list of "gifts" is not to expound on any one of them, but to emphasize that believers are to embrace those gift(s) given to them and employ them for the good and completeness of the "body [of Christ]".
- [9] Within the church, "love" is to be shown "without hypocrisy", "evil" is not to be tolerated⁶⁵, but rather "abhorred", and "good" is to be exalted.
- [10] The believer's life and service is to be characterized by humility, "preferring one another" over oneself, as preeminently modeled by the human life of Christ (cf., Philip2:3-8).

⁶⁴ The N.T. uses "church" in two different ways: 1) the local church is a small group of believers in a limited geographical area who assemble together for worship, training, fellowship, and service, and 2) the universal Church is that total number of all believers, from the day of Pentecost until the Rapture, also referred to as the Body/Bride of Christ.

⁶⁵ Today, the toleration within the professing church of that which is evil is rampant, including (for example) egalitarianism, humanism, globalism, and ecumenism. Increasingly, that which God has revealed as "good" is considered an embarrassment to Christendom.

- [11] Here, in context, "business" refers to work/labor within the church and/or for the Lord. The believer is not to be "slothful" (i.e., lazy) regarding his ministering (by means of the spiritual gifts given to him) within the body, but "fervent in . . . serving the Lord". For the believer to fail to fervently serve others using the gifts God has sovereignly and supernaturally given him for that very purpose is not merely wasteful, it is sinful.
- [12] The believer's motivating source of joy should be "hope". In the N.T., the concept of "hope" always has the idea of a confident expectation that what God has promised will come to pass (cf. Rom4:18-21). Furthermore, the promise of God that is the context of "hope" is more often than not the return of Christ (e.g., 1Thess2:19; Tit2:13; 1Pet1:13; 1Jn3:2-3). Our "hope" is not in the reformation of the present evil world, but in the return of Christ to personally establish His righteous kingdom on earth.
- In the exhortation to remain "patient in tribulation", the word translated "patient" means 'perseverance'. The Lord never promised the believer freedom from "tribulation" in the present life, just the opposite (Jn15:18-20; 16:1-2,33; Cp., 2Tim3:12). In the "tribulation" that will most assuredly come, the believer has no assurance of deliverance, but is exhorted to 'persevere'. Finally, we are to be constantly, in all circumstances, engaged in "prayer" (Cp., Eph6:18; 1Thess5:17).
- [13] Christians are to be characterized by "hospitality" toward others, and "saints" (i.e., believers) in need are to be given priority in our benevolence (e.g., Act2:44-45; 4:32-37; Rom15:25-27).
- [14] Nothing more starkly distinguishes a Christian from an unbeliever like his ability to "bless" the very people who "persecute" him. Such is unnatural behavior possible only in a life supernaturally transformed by God (Rom12:2). Christians are to be living object lessons of the grace of God (Cp., Eph3:42).
- [15] Christians are to sympathize/identify with others, whether in joy or sorrow. Personal relationships with others create opportunities: 1) to minister to other believers (Gal6:1-2), and 2) to witness to unbelievers (1Pet3:15).
- [16] The "same mind" all believers are to have in common is the "transformed mind" (Rom12:2), elsewhere called the "mind of Christ" (1Cor1:16), ever grounded in a **Biblical Worldview** (2Cor10:3-5). The ultimate "condescen[sion]" was demonstrated in the humiliation of Christ (Philip2:5-8), undertaken for our good, which serves as a lesson for us regarding our behavior toward others.
- [17] God uses His people to reveal His character to the world. God is holy, righteous, and just, but at the same time He is loving, gracious, and merciful. Whereas Israel's prescribed behavior under the Law (of Moses) emphasized justice (cf. Exod21:23-25), the Christian's behavior is called to magnify grace/mercy. The Christian's life is to be a public display of "things hon[orable]".

- [18] A Christian's earthly goal is to "live peaceably with all men". It is recognized that our behavior is only one-half of that equation, which requires cooperation on the part of others (many of whom are unbelievers who hate God and His people; Jn15:18-20). Irrespective of the participation (or lack thereof) of others toward peaceful coexistence, the Christian must at least do his part. This means endeavoring not to personally offend others (cf. 1Cor9:19-23; 10:32; 2Cor6:3), yet recognizing that the gospel itself is an offense to the natural man (Gal5:11).
- [19] Believers during the present dispensation (i.e., Christians) are called by God to display His attributes of love, grace, and mercy. We are to forsake any occasion to "avenge" ourselves or others⁶⁶. Rather we are to "give place unto wrath", meaning to await God's own righteous judgment. Paul's allusion to Deuteronomy 32:35 highlights the fact that God has promised to mete out "vengeance" perfectly according to His own timing (which can be temporal, but may be eschatological).
- [20] Quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22. In displaying grace toward his "enemy", the Christian is to actively minister to his needs. For, "in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head". The idea here is that there is often nothing more incomprehensible (and spiritually painful) to one who would do another harm than to have his evil returned with good, which provides an opportunity for witnessing which retaliation never would.
- [21] Summarizing, in the context of dealing with an "enemy" (v20) who is "persecut[ing] us (v14), we must not give in to the temptation to retaliate to his "evil", but in responding to it with "good" display the grace of God.

CHAPTER 13

THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

- [1] The "higher powers" and "powers that be" are references to human government. Human government is a divine institution established as part of the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9:5-6. As a **divine institution**⁶⁷, human government is "ordained" and defined by "God". As such, believers have an obligation to "be subject unto" (i.e., obey; cf. Tit3:1) their governments and its ministers.
- [2] Believers who "resisteth" their governments should expect (temporal) "judgment" from those governments.
- [3] Verses 3-4 present God's ideal for human government and its "rulers" (i.e., officials), which is to "praise" the "good" and to restrain "evil". As with all the divine institutions, man has perverted the practice of human government far from its ideal.

⁶⁶ This imperative to "avenge not" is directed toward individual Christians. This principle is different from, and does not negate, God's purpose for human governments to be His "minister" to "execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom13:4), even during the present Dispensation of Grace.

⁶⁷ The 5 divine institutions are: 1) the dominion of man (Gen1:26-30), 2) marriage (Gen2:18-24), 3) the family (Gen1:28; 4:1-2), 4) human government (Gen9:5-6), and 5) the nations (Gen10:1-32).

- [4] In its God-ordained role of restraining evil, God has entrusted "the sword" to human government. It is the duty of human governments "to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil", the pre-eminent obligation of which is to execute the murderer (cf. Gen9:5-6). To the extent to which a human "ruler" fulfills this role, "he is the minister of God".
- [5] Believers should obey their governments, not only out of fear of "wrath" (i.e., righteous judgment) for disobedience, but because God has commanded it.

Is Obedience to Human Government Limited? Submission to human government is not unqualified. When a commandment from a duly ordained authority conflicts with a commandment of God, our duty is to obey God. This is seen in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image (Dan3:18), in Daniel's refusal to stop praying to his God (Dan6:10), and in the apostles' refusal to cease speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus (Act4:18; 5:12-28). Peter made clear that when there is a conflict, "We ought to obey God rather than men".

- [6] Obedience to human government includes paying taxes for the purpose of supporting government officials who serve as "God's ministers". Jesus even asserted that Jews were obligated to pay taxes to Caesar (Matt22:21).
- [7] Beyond paying taxes for their support, believers owe government officials "fear" and "honor" as they serve in their righteous roles ordained by God.

THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO HIS NEIGHBOR

- [8] The Christian's supreme obligation to others is "to love one another". The Law of Moses commanded, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev19:18), which Jesus Himself asserted was the second greatest commandment (Matt22:39); here, Paul asserts that if one "love one another" he has "fulfilled the law" (Cp., Matt22:40).
- [9] If our supreme motivation relative to another is genuinely "love", that alone will preclude our sinning against him in any conceivable way.
- [10] Paul's conclusion is that a life perfectly motivated by the principle of "love" (an attribute of God; 1Jn4:8,16) is one that will unconsciously "fulfill . . . the law".
- [11] Addressing Christians, Paul is concerned with their sanctification (their justification is presumed since they have already "believed"). The "salvation" in view in this passage is the completion of our salvation process, which is ultimate sanctification (i.e., glorification). Here, "sleep" is a euphemism for spiritual apathy (Cp., Matt25:5).

- [12] Here, "the day is at hand" is a reference to "the day [of Christ]", or the *imminent* rapture of believers (Cp., Philip1:10; 2:16; 2Thess2:2).
- [13] Since the time remaining may be incredibly short, personal sanctification should be our greatest priority.
- [14] This is an allusion to the ultimate goal of our sanctification, which is "to be conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom8:29), the "Lord Jesus Christ".

CHAPTER 14

Not all Christians are at the same level of doctrinal understanding and/or spiritual maturity (i.e., sanctification). Furthermore, new believers enter the Christian life from diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds. For these reasons, the issue of inter-personal relationships between Christians deserves special attention.

THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO A WEAKER BROTHER

- [1] The mature Christian is to "receive" a brother who is "weak in the faith"; that is, spiritual immaturity is not a reason to withhold fellowship. Furthermore, such fellowship is not to be for the purpose of "doubtful disputations" (i.e., arguments over matters of Christian liberty).
- [2] The believer during the present age (i.e., Christian) has no dietary restrictions (cf. Act10:9-16); the mature Christian understands this. However, some Christians, for a variety of reasons, impose dietary restrictions on themselves (the Apostle Peter being an example of this).
- [3] The mature Christian who "eateth" is not to "despise" the weaker brother who "eateth not", and the weaker brother is not to "judge" the mature Christian. As a matter of Christian liberty, both scenarios are permissible.
- [4] Since the mature Christian and the weaker brother are both "servant[s]" having God as a "master", God will be their judge. It is not the place of one Christian to judge another in areas where liberty is permissible⁶⁸.
- [5] Another example where liberty is permissible is in the "esteem[ing]" of certain "day[s]", whether that be observance of the Sabbath, Jewish festivals (i.e., Passover), or even aspects of modern holidays such as Christmas.
- [6] Both diet and holiday observance are asserted by Paul to be areas where Christian liberty is permitted. It is the intent of the

⁶⁸ Whereas the Christian is commanded not to judge another believer, nor withhold fellowship from him, over matters where liberty is permissible, the Christian is commanded to both judge and avoid other believers when important doctrinal matters are the issue (Rom16:17).

heart guiding the believer's personal decision in such an area that is important, not the decision itself.

- [8] The chief tenet of the modern philosophy of **Humanism** is that 'man is the measure of all things' (i.e., man is the judge). Paul (and the whole sum of biblical revelation) rejects this philosophy. God is the supreme judge, and His opinion alone matters.
- [9] The very purpose of the work of Christ, including His death and resurrection, was to justify fallen sinners (Rom4:25), which includes the Christian's weaker brother.
- [10] The "judgment seat of Christ" is the coming judgment of believers for the purpose of rewards (cf. 1Cor3:11-15; 2Cor5:10). Since all Christians are servants of the Lord (v8), we will be judged by Him. It is not the mature Christian's prerogative to judge his weaker brother, or "set at nought thy brother" (i.e., consider him to be an unbeliever) over matters where liberty is permissible.

Matters of Christian Liberty. Christians are commanded to judge other believers in matters of obedience (e.g., 1Cor5:11-12; 2Thess3:14) and doctrine (e.g., Rom16:17). We are forbidden to judge other believers in matters of Christian liberty. The difference is that in areas of liberty (i.e., to eat or not to eat certain foods), any or all choices may be permissible; the determining factor as to whether the choice is sinful is the motivation behind the believer's choice (cf. Eph6:5-8). Since no man can know the heart of another, Christians cannot judge each other in such matters.

- [11] Quotation from Isaiah 45:23 (Cp., Philip2:10-11).
- [12] A Christian's behavior concerning matters where liberty is permissible will be judged by God (at the Judgment Seat of Christ). At issue will be the believer's motivation behind the choices he makes. Since no man can know the heart of another, Christians cannot judge each other in such matters. Since God alone can know the heart, He will judge righteously (1Cor4:5).
- [13] The mature Christian's judgment in such matters should be directed toward himself. Namely, is his behavior creating a "stumbling block" or "occasion to fall" for his weaker brother.
- [14] Returning to the example of foods, Paul himself has been "persuaded" that no food is "unclean"; he can eat any food with a clear conscience. However, another brother believes some foods are unclean, so he would be sinning against his own conscience to eat these foods.
- [15] Since it would "grieve" the weaker brother's conscience for the mature Christian to eat such foods in his presence, it would be unloving to do so (the sin of the mature Christian would not be in eating unclean food, but in acting in an unloving way toward his brother). The concern is the temptation it would cause the weaker brother to eat, when he believes doing so to be sinful; for him to give in to the temptation would "destroy" his sanctification.

- [16] A Christian can sin by doing something that is permissible.
- [17] The Christian should subjugate his liberties for the sake of "the kingdom of God". He should voluntarily forsake some of his liberties if it increases "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" in the life of a weaker brother.
- [18] As a servant of "Christ", the Christian will be judged in these matters at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He should desire that his behavior be found "acceptable to God".
- [19] All Christians should behave in ways that promote "peace" and "edif[ication]" among brothers.
- [20] Even though "all things are pure" (alluding to the example of foods), it is sinful for a believer to behave in a way he believes to be "evil". A Christian should never allow his liberty to "destroy . . . the work of God" in a weaker brother.
- [21] The mature Christian should be willing to refrain from eating, or drinking, or exercising his liberty in any area that would tempt his "brother" to "stumble".
- [22] The mature Christian can recognize his liberty in certain debatable areas within himself and "before God", but he is "condemn[ed]" when he exercises that liberty in a way that does harm to a weaker brother.
- [23] The weak Christian is "condemned" by eating that which he believes to be unclean (even though it is pure; v20). By extension, he commits sin when he willfully does something he believes to be sinful (even if God permits it). In the area of Christian liberty, it is the believer's conscience that is determinative, and "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Cp., Heb11:6).

CHAPTER 15

Continuing his exhortation relative to the progressive sanctification of the believer, Paul exalts Jesus Christ as the perfect man who came not to be served, but to serve (Matt20:28; Mk10:45). For this reason, He should be an object of our imitation (1Cor11:1).

IMITATORS OF CHRIST

- [1] Alluding to the subject of the previous chapter, Paul raises the bar for the "strong" (i.e., spiritually mature) Christian relative to his "weak" brother. More than not despising a weaker brother for his immaturity (Rom14:3) and refraining from the exercise of personal liberty which could be a temptation for him to sin against his conscience (Rom14:19-21), the mature Christian "ought" to actively help his less mature brother.
- [2] Exercising personal liberty only "please[s] ourselves" (v1), but helping a "neighbor" (i.e., "weak" brother; v1) pleases both him and God. The objective of the mature Christian should be the "good" and "edification" (i.e., sanctification) of others.

- [3] Alluding to Psalm 69:9, the perfect example of putting the good of others ahead of personal pleasure is "Christ".
- [4] Although the majority of the O.T. (i.e., from Exodus 19 through the Book of Malachi) records the history of the nation of Israel living under the Mosaic covenant, and in contrast the Christian is "not under the Law [of Moses]" (Rom6:14-15), nevertheless "whatever things were written aforetime" (i.e., the O.T.) are both relevant and important to every believer. The O.T. "scriptures" were "written for our learning" and contain rich truths, teaching us "patience" (i.e., perseverance), providing "comfort", and giving "hope". Furthermore, all the illustrations used by N.T. writers come from the O.T., so it is impossible to understand the N.T. while being ignorant of the O.T. The O.T. should be a subject of our intense study (2Tim2:15; Cp., 1Cor10:6,11).
- [5] Jesus prayed that His disciples would be "one", even as He and the Father are one (Jn17:21-23). Here, Paul prays for believers to be "like-minded one toward another according to Christ" (Cp., Rom12:16). That is, Christian unity includes our thinking.
- [6] God is glorified when Christians have "one mind" (i.e., a common understanding) and "one mouth" (i.e., a common testimony) concerning "our Lord Jesus Christ", both His Person and His teaching.
- [7] Christ is to be the object of our imitation relative to "receiv[ing] . . . one another". Christ received (into fellowship) all genuine believers, while never compromising His expectation for them to grow in personal sanctification (e.g., Jn4:18; 8:11).
- [8] Christ had a specific mission to "the circumcision" (i.e., the Jews, the nation of Israel). Far from annulling God's unconditional "promises" made to "the fathers" (i.e., the Abrahamic and associated covenants), Christ "confirm[ed]" them.
- [9] Relative to the "Gentiles", Christ's confirmation of the (Jewish) New covenant (Matt26:28) made possible the offer of God's "mercy" to them. Paul quotes from Psalm 18:49 to demonstrate God's mercy toward the "Gentile" nations was foreseen in the O.T.
- [10] Quotation from the prophetic Song of Moses (Deut32:43). Note that the Gentile "nations" are distinct from the Jewish nation, designated as "His people" (Cp., Exod19:5).
- [11] Quotation from Psalm 117:1. Gentile "nations" singing praises to "the Lord" strongly suggests their conversion.
- [12] Quotation from Isaiah 11:10. This passage in Isaiah concerns the future millennial reign of Christ on earth, which will include Gentile "nations" who have put their "trust . . . in Him".
- [13] Paul concludes this section on the imitation of Christ with a doxological prayer. Genuine "joy", "peace", and "hope" are supernatural works of the "Holy Spirit" available only by "believing" in Jesus Christ (Cp., Rom5:1-5).

PAUL'S PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

With the section on exhortation and practical application (Romans 12-15) of the grand soteriological doctrines expounded in this epistle (Romans 1-8) completed, Paul closes the letter with information concerning his personal circumstances and wishes.

- [14] Paul returns to his opening observation (cf. Rom1:8) that the (predominantly) Gentile churches in Rome, though apparently having had no apostolic presence or even visitation, have grown to an advanced level of spiritual maturity, "filled with all knowledge", and "able also to [teach] one another" (contrast this with the churches in Jerusalem; Heb5:11-14).
- [15] Because of their advanced level of spiritual maturity, Paul has been able to address them "boldly".
- [16] Consistent with his apostolic calling as a "minister . . . to the Gentiles" (Cp., Gal2:7), Paul addressed this epistle which includes his most exhaustive and systematic revelation of the "gospel of God" (Rom1:15-17) and the Holy Spirit's ministry of sanctification of the believer to the Gentile churches in Rome.
- [17] Paul's "glory" is not in any work of his own, but in "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (i.e., the work of Christ, Gal6:14), referred to as "the gospel of God" in the previous verse (v16).
- [18] Paul's message to the "Gentiles" is not of his own invention, but has come to him by revelation from God. He has communicated it faithfully "by word and deed" (meaning teaching and miracles).
- [19] Apostolic proclamation of new revelation from God was accompanied by "mighty signs and wonders" (2Cor12:12) to authenticate the message. Paul has "fully preached the gospel of Christ" from "Jerusalem" westward, all the way to "Illyricum" (today, Albania, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina), which was the Roman province to the immediate east of Italy (i.e., Rome). Paul's use of the description "fully" asserts that he has not withheld anything essential to understanding the "gospel of Christ" (Cp., Act20:27), which will come to be challenged by the Gnostic heretics near the end of the first century⁶⁹.
- [20] Here Paul sets forth his personal philosophy of ministry, which was to "preach the gospel, not where Christ was named" (i.e., go to unevangelized lands) so that he "should not build upon another man's foundation". If the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church that the Apostle Peter founded and resided at the church in Rome were true, this assertion of Paul's is preposterous. Clearly, Peter did not found the church in Rome, and there is no evidence he even visited Rome (Roman Catholic traditions to the contrary did not originate until several centuries later).

⁶⁹ Refutation of the Gnostic heresies based on so-called secret (or higher) knowledge available only to an elite class of enlightened persons is a major topic in John's epistles, which were written near the end of the first century.

The only Biblical evidence offered to support the presence of Peter in Rome is Peter's own testimony that he wrote his first epistle from Babylon (1Pet5:13), asserted to be a code word for Rome. However, there is no reason not to accept Peter's Babylon as the literal city on the banks of the Euphrates river. Peter, in contrast to Paul, was called by God to be the apostle to the Jews (Gal2:8), and he addressed his epistles to Jews scattered outside of Israel (1Pet1:1; 2Pet3:1). Since the largest concentration of Jews outside of Israel lived in Babylon⁷⁰, there was every reason for Peter to travel there in order to fulfill his apostolic calling.

- [21] Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:15 in support of his ministry philosophy of going to un-evangelized Gentile nations.
- [22] Consistent with this ministry philosophy, Paul desires to travel to and minister in Rome (Rom1:13), but he has been "hindered" from doing so.
- [23] Apparently the priority of Paul's work in other lands has been the cause that "hindered" (v22) his coming to Rome, but these other obligations having been fulfilled, he is now free to do so.
- [24] As such, Paul is planning a new missionary "journey" that will take him all the way to "Spain", and he intends to visit Rome as part of that endeavor.
- [25] Before he embarks on his missionary journey to Spain, however, he must go to "Jerusalem".
- [26] Paul's reason for traveling to Jerusalem first was to deliver the "contribution" that the believers in "Macedonia and Achaia" (i.e., Greece) have given to help the "poor saints who are at Jerusalem" (i.e., Jewish Christians); these Jewish "saints" in "Jerusalem" are "poor" because of their persecution by unbelieving Jews there (cf. Heb10:32-33).
- [27] Paul considers it the "duty" of "Gentile" believers to "minister" to the "carnal" needs of Jewish believers, since the "spiritual" blessings of God available to Gentiles come by means of the covenants God made with Israel (cf. Gen12:3; Gal8:9-9), and the work of the Jewish Messiah (Jn1:29; 1Jn2:2), in which Gentile believers are privileged to "partake" according to grace.
- [28] Although unrecorded in Scripture, there is extra-biblical testimony that Paul did indeed visit "Spain" (e.g., Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, c. 95 A.D.), suggesting he would have visited Rome as part of that endeavor. Of course, Scripture records that Paul was eventually taken to Rome as a prisoner (Act28:14-31), from which he writes multiple inspired letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy), and he is eventually executed there by Caesar Nero.

⁷⁰ When Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and decreed that Jewish captives there could return to Israel (Ezr1:1-4), less than fifty thousand did so (Ezr2:64); the majority of Jews failed to leave Babylon.

- [29] Paul's purpose in visiting the believers in Rome was to share with them "the fullness of the blessing of **the gospel of Christ**". Whether or not he was able to do this in person, Paul certainly accomplished his desire through this inspired epistle written to them, and by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in preserving Scripture (cf. Ps12:6-7) the gospel of Christ has been shared with all subsequent generations.
- [30] Paul (the Apostle!) requests personal prayer from the Roman believers, making mention of "the Lord Jesus Christ", "the Spirit", and "God [the Father]" (i.e., all three Persons of the triune Godhead).
- [31] Paul is concerned about his return to "Judea" (i.e., "Jerusalem", to deliver the offering he has collected for the Jewish believers there; vv25-26), fearing opposition from "them that do not believe"; this may actually refer to Jewish *believers* who still do not trust him and his ministry (Cp., Act9:20-21,26), since his concern is that his "service . . . may be accepted by the saints".
- [32] Paul's concern is that he would not be delayed in Jerusalem, thus confounding his plan to visit the churches in Rome after that.
- [33] Paul has asked for the Roman believers' prayers for God's "peace" relative to his needs, and he offers the same prayer for them.

VI. PERSONAL GREETINGS AND CONCLUSIONS
(Romans 16:1-27)

CHAPTER 16

Paul frequently ends his epistles with greetings to individuals whom he knows within the church he is addressing (Cp., 1Cor15:10-24; Philip3:20-23; Col4:7-18; 2Tim4:19-22; Tit3:12-15; Philem22-25; Heb13:20-25). This section in Romans is the largest such section of any of his letters (Rom16:1-23); in it he mentions by name 23 individuals (and alludes to numerous others) he personally knows in the church(es) in Rome. If the Apostle Peter were personally present in Rome at this time, as the Roman Catholic Church alleges, it is inconceivable that Paul would not make mention of it.

- [1] Phoebe was a member of the church at Cenchreae. Here Paul refers to Phoebe as a "servant" of that church, using the feminine form of the Greek **διάκονος** (i.e., deaconess). Although this Greek word for "servant" can be used as a technical term referring to the office in the N.T. church (cf. 1Tim3:13), it is also the most common Greek word used for a menial laborer. In the present context, there is no indication Paul is using "servant" as a technical term, and there is no warrant for taking this as justification for female deacons (especially when the passage that gives the qualification for deacons defines them to be men; 1Tim3:8-13).

Location of Cenchreae. Cenchreae was a sister city to Corinth, each located at the isthmus that connected northern Greece with the Peloponnesian peninsula (Cenchreae was on the east facing the Aegean Sea, Corinth on the west facing the Adriatic Sea).

- [2] Apparently Phoebe is planning to travel from Cenchræe to Rome for some (undefined) "business", and Paul exhorts the church(es) of Rome to "receive her [into their fellowship]" and "assist her" while she is there. Paul considered it to "becometh saints" (i.e., an obligation of churches) to assist traveling believers, which was a difficult endeavor in the first century (contrast with 2Jn10).
- [3] Priscilla and Aquila were Jewish Christians expelled from Rome by the decree of Claudius in 49 AD (Act18:2); his death in 54 AD allowed Jews to return, and Priscilla and Aquila had done so by the time Paul writes his letter to the Romans (c. 57 AD). They were instrumental in leading the Alexandrian Jew Apollos, a disciple of John the Baptist, to accept Jesus as Messiah (Act18:24-26).
- [4] Paul first met Aquila (and his wife Priscilla) in Corinth; they labored together as tentmakers, and Paul stayed in their home while preaching in the synagogue (Act18:1-3). The church eventually established in Corinth met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. When Paul left Corinth and traveled to Ephesus, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him; the church Paul established in Ephesus, as in Corinth, again met in their home (1Cor16:19). Priscilla and Aquila labored long in the cause of Christ with Paul, and Paul alludes to the fact that they had repeatedly risked their own safety on his behalf.
- [5] Having returned to Rome, Priscilla and Aquila again host a "church" in their "house". Nothing is known of Epænetus, but Paul's reference to him as "the first fruits of Asia unto Christ" suggests he was Paul's first convert in "Asia" (i.e., western Turkey", probably on his third missionary journey (Act16:6).
- [6] Mary (Lit., Miriam) may have been Jewish.
- [7] Andronicus and Junias (a feminine name) may have been husband and wife. Paul refers to them as "kinsmen", probably meaning nothing more than that they were Jewish (Cp., Rom9:3). That they were "in Christ before [Paul] means they had been Christians for approximately 25 years at this time, and their long and consistent service for the Lord was well-known to all the "apostles".
- [8] Ampliatus is unknown.
- [9] Urbanus and Stachys are unknown.
- [10] Apelles is unknown. He is referred to as "approved", perhaps a reference to his ability to correctly handle Scripture (2Tim2:15). "Aristobulus" might have been the grandson of Herod the Great.
- [11] Herodion was Paul's "kinsman", probably meaning nothing more than that he was Jewish (Cp., Rom9:3). His greeting to "them that are of the household of Narsissus, who are in the Lord" suggests that only certain members of this family were believers.

- [12] All three individuals in this verse, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, are women. Tryphaena and Tryphosa were probably sisters. All are noted for their "labor" for the "Lord".
- [13] Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene (Mk15:21), called "chosen in the Lord" (although true of all believers; Eph1:4) as a title of distinction. Apparently the "mother" of Rufus had cared for Paul at some time in the past.
- [14] These individuals, greeted along with "the brethren who are with them", may have been leaders in another of the house churches.
- [15] Philologus and Julia may have been husband and wife. These individuals, greeted along with "all the saints who are with them", may have been leaders in another of the house churches.
- [16] The "holy kiss" was a common personal salutation among friends (Cp., 1Cor16:20; 2Cor13:12; 1Thess5:26), something akin to the handshake of today.
- [17] In a parting word, Paul exhorts the believers in Rome to "mark" (i.e., identify) and separate from professing Christians who "cause division and offenses" within the body due to unorthodox "doctrine" (i.e., false teaching; cf. 1Tim1:3-7).
- [18] False teachers do not "serve" Christ, but "their own belly" (i.e., personal lusts, whether that be a desire for admiration, money, etc.). Their "words and fair speeches" are intended to "deceive".
- It is a Biblical directive to identify false teachers within our churches (today, denominations or broader Christian community) and separate from them. Although so-called discernment ministries attract the disdain of many Christians, their objectives are consistent with the Apostle Paul's directive in Romans 16:17-18.
- [19] Paul again mentions that the "obedience [to the faith]" of the Roman Christians is widely known "abroad" (Rom1:8). He reiterates a need for discernment, being "wise" regarding "good" but "simple" (i.e., pure, unmixed) concerning "evil" (Cp., Philip4:8).
- [20] Paul alludes to **Genesis 3:15**, the primeval prophecy of Satan's ultimate demise. The Roman Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, are identified with Him in defeating "Satan". That Paul suggests it will take place "shortly" is consistent with his teaching concerning the imminency of Christ's coming to rapture the Church (Cp., 1Cor15:51-52; 1Thess4:15).
- [21] Paul adds to his "greet[ings]" those from men who labored with him, including "Timothy" (Act16:1), "Lucius" (Act13:1), "Jason" (Act17:5-9), and "Sosipater", all Paul's "kinsmen" (i.e., Jews; Cp., Rom9:3).
- [22] Paul's amanuensis for this "epistle" identifies himself as "Tertius".
- [23] Final greetings come also from Gaius, Paul's "host" in Corinth and "of the whole church" (i.e., Gaius hosted a house church in Corinth and was personally baptized by Paul; 1Cor1:14), Erastus

the "chamberlain" (city official) of Corinth (2Tim4:20), and Quartus his "brother" (apparently a Gentile Christian).

CLOSING BENEDICTION

- [24] As always, Paul ends by commending his readers to the "grace" of God. God's "grace" is the all-sufficient answer for every human need. Because of his former work of blaspheming and persecuting the Church of Jesus Christ, no one understood and cherished the grace of God more than the Apostle Paul (cf. 1Tim1:12-14).

This ending commendation is the Apostle Paul's token phrase with which, by his own testimony, he closes all of his epistles (2Thess3:17; Cp., 1Cor16:23; 2Cor13:14; Gal6:18; Eph6:24; Philip4:23; Col4:18; 1Thess5:28; 2Thess3:18; 1Tim6:21; 2Tim4:22; Tit3:15; Philem25). This closing token is also present in Hebrews 13:25, but appears in no other N.T. epistle, consistent with Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

- [25] Verses 25-26 are Paul's acknowledgment of the so-called Great Commission (Matt28:19-20; Mk16:15), the unique ministry of the Church during the present age to "make [Jesus Christ] known to all nations" by "the preaching" of the "gospel" which has the power to save all who personally appropriate it by "faith" (cf. Rom1:15-17). Note that the calling of the Church is to evangelize the world, not to convert the world (which Jesus Himself revealed would not be accomplished; cf. Matt7:13-14).

Mystery in the New Testament. The English "mystery" is not a translation, but a transliteration of the Greek **μυστήριον**, which occurs 27 times in the N.T. The definition of "mystery", as used in the New Testament, is provided in Romans 16:25-26 (Cp., Eph3:3-5). A "mystery" is a truth which has been "kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God". In other words, a "mystery" is a doctrinal truth that: 1) can only be known by revelation from God, 2) God chose not to reveal in the O.T., but 3) God has now, for the first time in the history of the world, revealed it through His N.T. prophets (i.e., writers of Scripture). New Testament mysteries include the incarnation (1Tim3:16), the gospel (Eph6:19), the uniting of believing Jew and Gentile in one Body (i.e., the Church) during the present dispensation (Eph3:2-6), the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph5:32), the indwelling ministry of Christ (Col1:27), and the Rapture of the Church (1Cor15:51). Since God declares these truths to be mysteries, we cannot find explicit revelation of them in the O.T.

- [27] "God" alone is "wise", and in Him and in His Son "Jesus Christ" are "hid **all** the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col2:2-3). Nothing can be true that is not consistent with God and His revelation of truth in Scripture (Cp., Jn17:17).

--- S.D.G. ---

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