

THE MESSAGE OF

ROMANS

DAVID K. BERNARD

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By David K. Bernard

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To Charles, my friend (and brother-in-law)
To Karen, my little sister
To Julie, my littlest sister

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Preface

Romans has been called the theological masterpiece of the New Testament and perhaps of the Bible. If a person can master the concepts in the Book of Romans, he will have a solid foundation for all biblical study.

This study of Romans is based on the premise that Romans is part of the divinely inspired Word of God and, therefore, authoritative and infallible.

Although many books have been written on Romans, very little has been written from the Oneness Pentecostal perspective, which the author believes to be the most biblical, apostolic viewpoint. The purpose of this book, however, is not to defend a denomination or a preconceived dogma, but to exegete and analyze the Book of Romans. At the same time, the author has attempted to incorporate insights overlooked and issues undiscussed by authors of other doctrinal persuasions. The Table of Contents takes the form of a general outline of the Book of Romans, while more detailed outlines appear at the beginning of each major section.

It is assumed that the reader has access to the *King James Version (KJV)* of the Bible. As a service to the readers, this book uses the *New King James Version (NKJV)* as the primary study text, with some use of the *KJV* and *New International Version (NIV)*. The *NKJV* is not a new version but rather the most recent and most extensive revision of the *KJV*. While the *KJV* was originally produced in 1611, it has undergone numerous revisions; the *KJV* most often used today is actually the 1769 edition of Dr. Blayney of Oxford. The *NKJV* has

modernized vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar while seeking to preserve accuracy and to retain traditional form and style.

Both the *KJV* and the *NKJV* are based on the Textus Receptus (the Received Text), which is the traditional Greek New Testament text supported by over ninety percent of the manuscripts. The majority of scholars today use a slightly different Greek text, called here the “critical text” and identified as the Nestle-Aland text (26th Edition) and United Bible Societies Text (3rd edition) of the Greek New Testament. Where the critical text omits a significant word or phrase or otherwise varies significantly from the Textus Receptus, this book so notes. As the reader will observe, the variations are relatively minor; none significantly affects doctrinal content.

This book arose out of five years of teaching Romans at Jackson College of Ministries. Each year the study of Romans gave the author fresh insights, enrichment, and inspiration. It is hoped that the reader will be similarly blessed as he immerses himself in the study of the Word of God.

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Introduction

The Book of Romans is one of the most powerful and influential books of the Bible. It ranks first among Paul's writings in theological depth and significance as well as in length. It discusses the Christian doctrine of salvation in greater detail than any other biblical book. The theological concepts apply to all mankind regardless of place, culture, or time.

The Necessity of Theology

Before discussing the facts concerning the Book of Romans, it is important to establish the need to study the Bible from a theological perspective. By theology, we mean a systematic, logical study of biblical doctrine.

Studying theology enables us to develop an organized system of thought in doctrinal areas. This in turn enables us (1) to make a consistent defense of the faith and (2) to know all the biblical material relative to specific doctrines. In this way we can fulfill scriptural admonitions (1) to be studious (diligent) workers approved of God, who are not ashamed but who rightly divide (correctly handle) the Word of truth (II Timothy 2:15); (2) to use Scripture profitably for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16); (3) to be strong in our beliefs rather than tossed about by every

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wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14); and (4) to give answers to everyone who asks about our faith (I Peter 3:15).

Some erroneously suppose that theology has a deadening effect on spirituality. Nothing could be further from the truth. A sincere, prayerful study of biblical doctrine will enhance true spirituality. In fact, true spirituality, as opposed to mysticism or existentialism, can only develop from a solid understanding of God's Word. The truth sets us free spiritually (John 8:32). The more we comprehend divine principles, the more God's power will operate in our lives and in our churches.

Another erroneous assumption is to say there is little connection between doctrinal beliefs on one hand and character or lifestyle on the other. To the contrary, what we believe will definitely determine our conduct. Inadequate or false doctrinal views definitely affect the way we live, the actions we take, and the choices we make. The more we assimilate divine principles, the more Christ-like we will become in practical living.

The way to grow to maturity in the faith is to have a balance of theology and spirituality. We must be as zealous to study and meditate on God's Word as we are to worship God and fellowship each other. We must be as zealous to pray and worship as we are to study.

To some extent every minister must be a theologian and every theologian must be a minister. To minister to others, we must have a solid scriptural base. Our minds must be saturated with God's Word. Our counsel and preaching must proclaim godly principles, not our own ideas. On the other hand, every Bible student must be involved in practical ministry, not just in ivory-tower theorizing. God's Word becomes alive as we place it

into action. Only by applying it to all aspects of life do we truly understand the Word of God.

Inspiration and Place in the Canon

Since Romans is part of the Bible, the claim for its inspiration will stand or fall along with the claims of the Bible as a whole. Romans does contain some internal claims of scriptural authority. First, it claims authorship by an apostle chosen of God (Romans 1:1). The author claimed his words were truth (Romans 9:1). He admonished his readers to separate themselves from any who refused to obey the doctrines they learned, which certainly included the doctrines of the book itself (Romans 16:17). If we accept Romans as valid, we must accept its claim to be the inspired Word of God.

Recognizing that Romans is inspired of God, all Christendom has acknowledged its rightful place in the canon (the list of books accepted as Scripture). From the earliest times, the church has recognized the canonicity of Romans. Peter referred to all of Paul's epistles as Scripture, which certainly included this book, perhaps his foremost epistle (II Peter 3:15-16). Many leaders in ancient church history quoted or alluded to Romans as Scripture. Between A.D. 90 and A.D. 150, for example, Polycarp, Clement of Rome, and the *Didache* cited or alluded to Romans and Irenaeus declared it to be authentic. By A.D. 250 Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian referred to the book as authoritative. We have no record of its authenticity or canonicity ever being in dispute. All the early canons, translations, and decrees of councils recognized it as part of the New Testament.

Text

Scholars generally agree that the entire sixteen chapters of Romans belong in the book and were written by one author. All existing Greek manuscripts of Romans include the sixteen chapters. In ancient times, some people circulated the book without chapter 16 and some even omitted chapter 15 as well. Since chapter 16 consists primarily of greetings to Roman saints, it is understandable that some would omit it when circulating the book to other churches. In view of its nondoctrinal content, there is no motive for anyone to have included chapter 16 if it were not genuine. No one would benefit by forging such a chapter.

The omission of chapter 15 by some apparently resulted from the influence of Marcion, an early heretic who repudiated the Old Testament. Since chapter 15 contains a string of Old Testament quotations and describes the Old Testament as written for our learning (Romans 15:4), it is not surprising that Marcion eliminated it, as he did many other portions of the New Testament. The first half of chapter 15 continues and concludes the thought of chapter 14. Clearly, then, chapter 14 is not complete without chapter 15 and could not be the end of the book.

This commentary primarily uses the *New King James Version* for the English translation of the epistle, with some use of the *KJV*. This has the advantage of avoiding archaic words and archaic punctuation present in the earlier revisions of the *King James Version*. Moreover, the *KJV* does not always facilitate a detailed doctrinal study based on key words, because, for stylistic and contextual reasons, the *KJV* sometimes uses dif-

ferent English words to translate the same Greek word. Where the *NKJV* follows this practice, this commentary seeks to provide the additional information in significant instances.

The *KJV* and *NKJV* are based on the 1527 Greek text of Erasmus. This text does not take into account the evidence from early manuscripts discovered since that time, nor does it reflect the conclusions of modern textual criticism. To give the reader as much information as possible, this book identifies significant words or phrases regarded by most scholars today as not originally part of the Greek text. It will also note any other significant variations from the present-day critical text.

Author

Since the Book of Romans is part of the inspired Word of God, in the final analysis God is the true author of the book. God did use a human agent to write the book, and according to Romans 1:1 that human author was Paul.

Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was a very devout, highly educated Jew (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:4-6). He originally persecuted the Christians bitterly, but after a miraculous conversion experience he began to preach the gospel he once opposed. He received his apostolic calling from God and his understanding of the gospel by divine revelation (Galatians 1:1, 11-12). He became the chief apostle to the Gentiles, the greatest missionary of the Early Church, and the writer of much of the New Testament. Acts 9 and Acts 22 record Paul's conversion, while Acts 13-28 record his ministry.

Scholars agree that Paul wrote Romans. Only a very few radical critics have challenged this view, and their

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conclusions have not received significant acceptance. For Bible believers the statement of Romans 1:1 is conclusive.

Paul dictated Romans to a Christian scribe named Tertius (Romans 16:22). Apparently Phoebe, a worker in the church of Cenchrea, delivered the letter for Paul (Romans 16:1-2).

Date and Place of Writing

The internal evidence strongly indicates that Paul wrote the Book of Romans at Corinth, during his threemonth stay there while on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3). Paul had preached the gospel all the way to Illyricum (north of Greece) but had not yet preached in Rome (Romans 1:13; 15:19). He was in the process of gathering a collection (offering) in Macedonia and Achaia (where Corinth was located) to carry to the needy saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26). Paul discussed this collection with the Corinthians (I Corinthians 16:1-4; II Corinthians 8; 9), and he accomplished this task at the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 24:17). At the time Paul wrote Romans he was staying with Gaius (Romans 16:23), and the Corinthian church had a member named Gaius whom Paul had baptized personally (I Corinthians 1:14). The city from which Paul wrote had a treasurer, which indicates it was a provincial capital or at least a large city (Romans 16:1-2). Paul mentioned Cenchrea, the eastern seaport of Corinth, as though it were nearby (Romans 16:1-2). In short, everything points to Paul's stay at Corinth during his third missionary journey.

Given this evidence, most scholars say Paul wrote Romans during the winter of A.D. 57-58, probably during the early days of 58, perhaps in February. Some date it

a year earlier. Either date places it in the first half of Emperor Nero's reign (A.D. 54-68), during a relatively peaceful, prosperous time for the city of Rome. This also makes Romans one of the first books of the New Testament to be written. It is one of the earlier Pauline epistles, coming only after Thessalonians, Galatians, and Corinthians.

Original Audience

The Book of Romans is a letter. Paul addressed it to the Christian believers in the city of Rome (Romans 1:7). Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, was the largest, most important city in Paul's world. At this time Rome had an estimated population of over 4,000,000, including a large Jewish population—large enough to support at least eleven synagogues.¹ The traditional, polytheistic religion of Rome was in a state of decay, and there were apparently a large number of Gentile "God-fearers." These people attended the synagogue and conformed their lives to the moral commandments, though they had not officially become Jewish proselytes through circumcision.

The church at Rome was apparently very large. Romans 16 indicates that the believers met in several groups throughout the city. In A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus recorded the existence of "an immense multitude" of Christians in Rome.² Paul's comments suggest that the church was strong and mature, and had existed for a number of years (Romans 15:14, 23-24).

Who founded the church in Rome? Paul certainly did not, for he had never been there. The Roman Catholic Church claims Peter founded the Roman church, but the internal evidence excludes this possibility. Paul expressly

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stated that he would not build upon another man's foundation (Romans 15:20), yet he planned to go to Rome to build them up and to impart "some spiritual gift" (Romans 1:11-15). Moreover, if Peter were the founding, ruling bishop of the Roman church, Paul would have certainly included him among the twenty-eight Roman saints he mentioned in Romans 16:3-16.

Perhaps some of the Roman Jews present on the Day of Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and returned to Rome with the gospel (Acts 2:10). Perhaps some relatives of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, brought the gospel to Rome (Acts 10). If not, then the Roman church probably came into existence as Christians migrated there from other parts of the Roman Empire, probably from churches Paul had established in Asia Minor. This seems likely since Paul already knew many of the Roman believers, having converted some and worked in the gospel with others (Romans 16:3-16).

It seems that a majority of the Roman church were Gentiles (Romans 1:5; 11:13; 15:14-16). It appears, however, that there was a significant number of Jewish Christians in the church (Romans 4:1; 9:10). Paul expected his readers to be familiar with the law, which suggests that many in the church were Jews, Jewish proselytes, or Gentile "God-fearers" (Romans 7:1).

Of course, as Paul recognized in another one of his letters, his writings applied not only to the local church he addressed but to all Christians (I Corinthians 1:2).

Purpose

The immediate purpose of the letter was to inform and assure the Roman believers of Paul's intention and

plan to visit them soon (Romans 1:11-13).

Aside from this immediate occasion for writing, Paul evidently had a larger purpose in mind. He desired to give an orderly, comprehensive statement of the gospel. The Book of Romans as a whole actually resembles a doctrinal treatise more than a letter.

Why did Paul feel the need to address such a treatise to the Romans? He was not responding to internal problems in the church or attacking a particular group of false teachers. He recognized the maturity of the Roman church, but as the apostle to the Gentiles he keenly felt his responsibility to the church of the foremost Gentile city. Since he had never been able to teach them in person, he felt compelled by his divine calling to convey in writing his God-given message to them (Romans 15:14-16).

Through this doctrinal presentation he sought to gain the support of their prayers and other assistance for his missionary endeavors (Romans 15:24, 30). More importantly, he wanted to safeguard them against false doctrines and to enlist them in the defense of the truth. He knew Judaizers and other false teachers would attack them, and he wanted to equip them to resist error and fight for truth.

In this larger purpose for the epistle, we see the hand of God at work. God inspired Paul to write Romans so that the church would have a clear, powerful statement of the gospel of salvation by faith. As such, God designed Romans to have a universal application.

Style and Structure

The style of Romans is characteristically Pauline, with

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Paul's favorite terms and expressions appearing throughout the book. The sections on justification by faith and the believer's life (chapters 3-8) are closely related to Paul's earlier letter to the Galatians. The section on practical Christian living (chapters 12-15) has many teachings in common with Paul's earlier letter of I Corinthians.

Paul's style in Romans is very forceful and powerful. Although Paul addressed the letter to the Roman church, he stated its argument in such a way as to give it universal relevance.

The Book of Romans is heavily doctrinal. It contains more quotations from the Old Testament than the rest of the Pauline epistles put together (excluding Hebrews). Its presentation of doctrine is systematic and logical. As a result, Romans is the most formal of Paul's books and indeed of all the books of the Bible.

Structurally, we can divide the book into three major sections:

- (1) *Prologue*—personal introduction (1:1-17).
- (2) *Body*—substance or doctrinal content (1:18-15:13).
- (3) *Epilogue*—personal conclusion (15:14-16:27).

Summary of Content

Romans 1:16-17 states the theme of the book: The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. This saving power comes to all who believe. The righteous shall live by faith.

We can divide the body of the epistle into five major points, all centered around the righteousness of God, which He bestows upon believers:

- (1) *Universal Guilt*—The universal need of God's righteousness (1:18-3:20).

(2) *Justification by Faith*—The means of receiving God's righteousness (3:21-5:21).

(3) *The Believer's Life*—The life of holiness that results from receiving God's righteousness (6:1-8:39).

(4) *The Condition of Israel*—Israel's rejection of God's righteousness in relation to past, present, and future (9:1-11:36).

(5) *Practical Exhortations for Christian Living*—God's righteousness in practical life (12:1-15:13).

As this brief outline demonstrates, Romans is organized very logically. It first proves that all men are sinners and need salvation. Next it explains how all men can be saved—through faith in Christ, based on Christ's death and resurrection. Then it describes the new life that results from being saved—a life of holiness and walking in the Spirit. After this, it deals with a very serious objection in Paul's day to his teaching, namely, why God's chosen people Israel did not follow this doctrine of salvation by faith. Finally, it gives some very practical instructions regarding the conduct of the righteous in their relationships to God, the church, mankind, the state, and each other.

Although Romans teaches doctrine in an organized, rational sequence, it is not a systematic theology in the strict sense. That is, it does not attempt to discuss all major doctrines and present them in a complete system. For example, systematic discussions of Christology and of eschatology are notably absent from Romans. There are allusions to Paul's strong belief in Christ's deity (Romans 9:5; 14:10-11), but we find his systematic treatment of Christology in Colossians. Likewise, Paul touched on end-time events (Romans 11:25-27), but we find his specific

presentation of eschatology in I and II Thessalonians.

Moreover, Romans does not contain a detailed discussion of repentance, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, since Paul was addressing believers who had already received this experience. Romans 6 and 8 do contain important references to these past events, however. We should also note that the Book of Romans almost never mentions forgiveness or remission of sins. Instead it almost always speaks of conversion in terms of justification. Both are important ways of looking at God's work in salvation.

Although Romans is not actually a systematic theology treating the whole of Christian doctrine, it does cover many important principles in a comprehensive way. Examples are the doctrines of sin, justification by faith, righteousness, grace, law, and holiness.

Definition of Key Terms

At this point it is helpful to define some key doctrinal terms that appear in the *KJV* or *NKJV* text of Romans and in this commentary.

Atonement: (1) A covering for sin; satisfaction of divine justice. In this sense it appears only in the Old Testament (Exodus 29:33), but the *KJV* word *propitiation* in Romans 3:25 means "a sacrifice of atonement," as the *NIV* translates. (2) In Romans 5:11, *KJV*, the word *atonement* should be rendered "reconciliation."

Carnal: Fleshly, natural; specifically: (1) physical, material (15:27); (2) of the sinful human nature (8:6-7).

Exhortation: Encouragement; comfort (12:8).

Faith: Man's positive response to God's grace, which includes both acceptance and appropriation (or applica-

tion); the means by which man appropriates God's grace. Includes trust, reliance, commitment, and obedient response (3:22).

Faith, Saving: Acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the sole means of salvation and obedience to that gospel (application or appropriation of that gospel).

Flesh: (1) The physical body (2:28). (2) Mankind (3:20). (3) Human nature, including natural human descent (1:3), human weakness (6:19), and the sinless humanity of Christ (8:3). (4) Sinful human nature with its sinful desires, including the unregenerate human nature before conversion (8:8-9) and the sinful nature still present in the believer (7:18).

Gospel: The good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for our salvation (1:1, 16). (See I Corinthians 15:1-4.)

Grace: The unmerited favor of God toward man; the undeserved blessings of God; God's work of salvation in man (3:24).

Justification: (See verb form for scriptural citations.) (1) The act by which God declares a sinner to be righteous. (2) Something that shows or demonstrates one to be righteous.

Justify: (1) To declare righteous, to count one righteous (3:26, 28). (2) To show or demonstrate that one is righteous (3:26; James 2:24).

Law: (1) The five books of Moses (3:21). (2) The Old Testament (3:19). (3) A principle (3:27). (4) The law of God; God's moral law; the revealed will of God at any given time (2:14; 3:20). (5) The law of Moses (3:28).

Minister: (1) Noun: servant, attendant, or deacon (13:4; 15:8; 16:1). Verb: to serve; to help; to give aid

(12:7). (2) Noun: public, administrative, or priestly servant (13:6). Verb: to perform public, religious, or priestly service (15:27).

Mortify (KJV): To put to death; to kill (8:13).

Old Man: The unregenerate lifestyle; the dominion of sin (6:6). (See also Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9.)

Propitiation: (1) Place of atonement; mercy seat. (2) Sacrifice of atonement; something that allows God to pardon sin without violating His principles of justice; an offering that turns away divine judicial wrath; an offering that satisfies divine justice (3:25).

Reconciliation: Restoration to a relationship; restoration to favor (5:10-11).

Redemption: Complete deliverance by payment of a price (3:24).

Reprobate (KJV): Not standing the test, unqualified, worthless, base, debased, depraved. A reprobate mind is a mind in which the distinctions between right and wrong are confused or lost (1:28).

Sanctification: Separation from sin; holiness; process of actually becoming righteous (6:19-22). Consists of an initial act of separation from sin at the new birth plus a progressive work of growing in holiness until the end of this life. The *KJV* translates the same Greek word as “holiness” five times (including Romans 6:19, 22) and as “sanctification” five times (including I Corinthians 1:30; II Thessalonians 2:13).

Spirit: (1) The human spirit; the God-conscious, spiritual part of man in contrast to the natural (literally, “soul-ish”) part of man (1:9). (2) The Spirit of God; Holy Spirit; Spirit of Christ (1:4; 8:11).

Wrath of God: Judicial attitude of God in relation to

the sinner; hatred of sin and punishment of the sinner (1:18).

Footnotes

¹D. Edmund Hiebert, *An Introduction to the Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 165.

²*Ibid.*, p. 171.

I.

Prologue

(1:1-17)

Personal introduction

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Prologue (1:1-17)

The introductory portion of Paul's epistle to the Romans consists of an expanded greeting passage, a brief discussion of Paul's travel plans and purpose for writing, and a powerful statement of the theme of the epistle.

A. Salutation (1:1-7)

(1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God (2) which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, (3) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, (4) and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, (5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, (6) among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; (7) To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Book of Romans begins with a salutation patterned after a typical letter in New Testament times. Such a letter began with the sender's name, the recipient's name, and a statement of greeting. Paul expanded this form and gave it a rich Christian phrasing.

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Verse 1. Paul first introduced himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, a phrase reminiscent of the one used by Old Testament prophets: “servant of Jehovah.” The Greek word is *doulos*, literally meaning “a slave.” Paul’s highest calling and noblest mark of identity was to be a devoted slave of Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul described himself as called by God to be an apostle, a title which literally means “one sent,” or a messenger. While Paul did not claim to be one of the Twelve (I Corinthians 15:5), he was sent by the church and the Holy Spirit as an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4; 14:14; Galatians 2:7-9). He was called to be an apostle and set apart for the preaching of God’s gospel. No mere mortal could give him this ministry; he received it from God Himself (Galatians 1:1, 15-16).

The gospel is literally “the good news” about salvation. It is not of man, but its source is God. The good news is that Jesus came to this world as God manifested in flesh, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

Verse 2. This gospel is not new; God promised the gospel beforehand through the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, the Old Testament predicted Christ’s birth (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6), suffering and death for our sins (Isaiah 53), burial (Psalm 16:10), and resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11; 110:1), as well as the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). The Book of Romans takes great care to base all its major doctrinal points on the Old Testament. (See, for example, 1:17, 3:10-21, and 4:1-8.)

Verse 3. The gospel concerns God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all. The term *Son* refers to the mani-

festation of God in flesh. As a man, Jesus is the Son of God—the manifestation of God in flesh—because the Spirit of God caused the conception to take place in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35). As to His divine nature, Jesus is the one God revealed in the Old Testament. As to His human nature, Jesus is David’s descendant (Matthew 1:1; Luke 3:31), begotten of God and born of Mary.

Verse 4. Christ’s resurrection from the dead declared or made known to all that He was indeed the Son of God. Supernatural power effected the resurrection, specifically the power of the Spirit of holiness. The Spirit of holiness is none other than Christ’s own holy, divine nature, for He raised Himself from the dead (John 2:19-21). Verses 3-4 contrast Christ’s humanity (“according to the flesh”) with His deity (“according to the Spirit of holiness”). Christ’s “Spirit of holiness” is the Holy Spirit—the two phrases are linguistically equivalent. In fact, “the Lord is the Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:17). “The dead” is plural in Greek, denoting that the resurrection of Christ’s body is only the first of many physical resurrections to take place by the power of His Spirit (Romans 8:11; I Corinthians 15:20-23).

Verse 5. Through Christ, Paul received “grace and apostleship,” which possibly means “the grace of apostleship.” Grace is the unmerited favor of God. God bestowed this grace upon Paul in order to produce obedience to the faith—“the obedience of faith” (16:26, *KJV*) or “the obedience that comes from faith” (*NIV*).

Faith here does not mean doctrine but belief itself. From the outset, the Book of Romans makes clear that genuine faith will always produce, and cannot be separated from, obedience. Justification by faith is inseparably

linked with obedience to the gospel. This concept is reiterated at the book's end (15:18; 16:26).

God desires obedient believers among all nations—the Gentiles—for His name's sake. God wants the name of Jesus to be exalted by everyone. With this statement, Paul's salutation has touched on all the essential aspects of New Testament salvation: the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Spirit, holiness, grace, faith, obedience, and the name of Jesus. The salutation introduces the theme of the book—justification by faith that is obedient—and identifies this doctrine as a fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Verse 6. Paul's readers were called out ones belonging to Jesus Christ. They were among the Gentiles called to belong to Christ.

Verse 7. Paul particularly addressed the church in Rome. By virtue of being called to be Christ's, the people were beloved of God and were also called to be saints—sanctified, separated, consecrated, dedicated ones. The New Testament uses this term for all believers, and all believers are to be separated from sin and dedicated to God; all are to be God's holy people.

Paul's Christian form of greeting is "Grace and peace." The standard Greek salutation was *chairein* (greetings), but Paul used *charis* (grace). The standard Hebrew salutation was *shalom* (peace), and Paul used the Greek equivalent here, thus combining into a Christian phrase both the Greek and Hebrew forms of greeting. Grace (unmerited favor) is the cause, and peace (harmony with God and the resulting tranquility of soul) is the effect. Both come from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, because of the death, burial, and res-

urrection—the mediatorial work—of the man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5).

The greeting phrase here is typical of Paul's epistles. It is not a reference to trinitarianism; if it were, one question that needs an answer is, Why does it omit the Holy Spirit? Rather, the greeting emphasizes the necessity of not only acknowledging God as Creator and Father (which the Jews and many pagans did) but also acknowledging God's revelation in Christ. It emphasizes that God's provision of salvation comes only through Christ.

The definite article ("the") does not appear in Greek before "Lord Jesus Christ." So verse 7 literally says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek conjunction here is *kai*, which can mean "even" as well as "and," depending on the context; so the phrase could actually mean "from God our Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ."

When we compare Romans 1:7 with similar phrases elsewhere in Paul's epistles, we find a strong indication that Paul meant to identify God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the same being. For example, II Thessalonians 1:12, I Timothy 5:21, II Timothy 4:1, and Titus 2:13 all identify God and Jesus Christ as one and the same being. This is especially clear because Granville Sharp's rule applies to the Greek text of these verses: If two nouns of the same number, gender, and case are connected by *kai* and if the first noun has the definite article but the second does not, then both nouns refer to the same thing.¹

B. Paul's Personal Interest (1:8-15)

(8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole

world. (9) For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, (10) making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. (11) For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—(12) that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. (13) Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. (14) I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. (15) So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Verse 8. After expressing his greetings, Paul described his great interest in the Roman church and his great desire to visit them, which explained why he wanted to write to them. As with most of his epistles, he included a thanksgiving and a prayer. He first offered thanksgiving to God for the good report throughout the world of their faith. Just as God offered grace through Christ, so Paul offered thanks to God through Christ.

Verse 9. After his thanksgiving, Paul assured the Romans of his great burden for them as demonstrated by his prayer on their behalf. God could bear witness that he prayed unceasingly for the Roman believers. This passage is a powerful witness to the importance of intercessory prayer. Although Paul had never met the Roman believers, much less converted them, he deemed it important and worthwhile to pray for them constantly.

Paul served God in spirit, implying service of the whole man and not just the body or soul only. He did not serve God merely from the human personality but from the innermost depths of his spiritual being in humility and communion. Paul served God in the gospel of His Son. The only way we can truly serve God today is by obeying and spreading the gospel of His Son—the good news that God came in flesh as the Son and that the Son died for the sins of the world.

Verse 10. At the time of this letter, Paul was praying that by God's will he could somehow come to Rome (15:32). This demonstrates not only the importance of prayer, but the importance of praying for the will of God. All prayer should be subject to the condition, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Luke 11:2). All plans should be subject to the condition, "If the Lord wills" (James 4:15).

Verse 11. Paul yearned to visit the Roman church to impart some spiritual gift. He did not refer to one of the special gifts of Romans 12 or I Corinthians 12; rather he wanted to impart a fuller understanding of truth that they might be established more completely.

Verse 12. Paul tactfully qualified his statement by expressing his desire to be blessed by them as much as to bless them, an idea he emphasized again in the epilogue (15:32). Their mutual faith would encourage each other. This demonstrates the importance of Christian fellowship and humility. Not only was Paul humble in service toward God (1:1, 9), but he was also humble toward those to whom he preached the gospel. Despite his great wisdom, experience, and apostolic calling, he did not treat them as beneath him in any way, but he believed that he and they

could encourage each other. This is an important attitude for all preachers and teachers to acquire and project; God has given them a specialized ministry, but that gives them no right to be arrogant, condescending, or proud.

Verse 13. Paul had often planned to visit Rome but had been hindered (the correct meaning of the *KJV* word *let*) for reasons he explained more fully in 15:19-23. As the apostle to the Gentiles, he wanted spiritual fruit in this foremost of Gentile cities just as he had in other Gentile areas. Here he used a characteristic phrase to stress those plans: “I do not want you to be unaware” or “I would not have you ignorant” (*KJV*).

Verse 14. Why was Paul so humble in his dealings with those to whom he ministered? Why did he have such a great desire to minister to the Romans? In this verse, he expressed a great obligation or duty to preach the gospel to all mankind. He considered his ministry as not just the impartation of a gift, but as the payment of a debt.

The Greeks were all those whose language and culture were Greek. To the Greeks, all non-Greeks were known as barbarians. The “wise” were the educated and intelligent, the “unwise” probably included most of the common people. Paul thus encompassed all the world in verse 14: Greeks and non-Greeks, intellectuals and commoners.

Verse 15. Because of his intense God-given burden to preach to all the world, Paul was certainly ready with everything in him to preach in Rome. He eagerly desired to witness in the capital and the largest city of Paul’s world, and in Rome dwelt people from all across the Roman Empire. For someone who had a worldwide burden, this most influential and cosmopolitan city had an irresistible attraction.

C. Theme of the Epistle (1:16-17)

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

These two verses summarize the doctrinal argument of the epistle.

Verse 16. Paul first proclaimed that he was not ashamed of the gospel, which is the good news of salvation through Christ. (The critical text omits "of Christ.") By using this negative phrase Paul perhaps meant to stress that he actually gloried in the gospel. Certainly it meant he was not disappointed in or embarrassed by the gospel. It would not shame him to preach the gospel even in intellectual, powerful, worldly Rome. He had this confidence, for he knew by experience how powerful the gospel was. Likewise, we should not be ashamed to preach and teach the whole gospel under any circumstances, because it has the power to support miraculously its claims, to overcome all opposition, and to transform lives.

Specifically, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It embodies supernatural power. Salvation covers all of God's provision for the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—in the past, present, and future. It includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. The gospel is the solution to all of man's problems, the provision for all of man's needs.

The saving power of the gospel comes to everyone who believes. The present tense indicates that salvation is

not predicated merely upon a one-time profession of faith but upon a continual relationship of faith. As Charles Erdman commented, "Faith is not the mere intellectual acceptance of a truth; it expresses a relation to a divine Person, an attitude of trust and submission and love."² *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* stated that the Greek word *pisteuo*, translated as "believe," has a very deep meaning: "Belief in the content of the Gospel is only part of its meaning. Above this it means trust or personal commitment, to the extent of handing over one's self to another. . . . To believe in Christ is to commit oneself to him. To trust Christ is to become totally involved in the eternal truth taught by him and about him in the NT."³

The gospel came first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. The text literally says "the Greek," meaning Greek-speakers. For the Jews in Paul's day this term was more or less equivalent to "Gentile," since Greek was the language of commerce throughout their world. The designation of Jew first does not indicate preference, for God shows no partiality (2:11). It simply states the historical fact of an order in time. Justification by faith came to the Jews first, Christ came to the Jews first, the baptism of the Holy Spirit came to the Jews first. Now, however, in the plan of God the gospel has come to the Gentiles also.

Verse 17 restates the truth that salvation comes by faith. The gospel reveals God's righteousness to those who have faith. "The righteousness of God" has a twofold significance: (1) God's personal righteousness and (2) the righteousness God confers on the believer. It is all that God demands of man and also all that God provides to man through Christ. The revelation of God's righteous-

ness is also twofold: (1) God's justice is vindicated and (2) man receives righteousness (3:26). This revelation occurs "from faith to faith." It is based on faith and revealed to those with faith. From start to finish it is a product of faith. All aspects of salvation, from initial justification to progressive sanctification to ultimate glorification come by faith in God and not by human works. The Christian life progresses from one step of faith to another; it is a life of continual faith.

To establish that justification by faith was not a new concept, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4, which reads, "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." The "just" means the "righteous"—one who is in correct legal status before God. This standing comes through faith, not works. Again, the emphasis is on a continual life of faith, not just a point in time.

The prophet Habakkuk cried out to the Lord against the oppression suffered by his nation, Judah. He asked God how long He would allow the righteous to suffer and the wicked to prosper. God responded with the words of Habakkuk 2:4. The righteous must wait patiently upon the Lord, trusting and obeying Him, and in the end God's justice will prevail. In the meantime, the righteous lives by his faith, not by his strength or by favorable circumstances.

Paul took Habakkuk 2:4 as his text and used the principle it enunciated as the theme of the epistle. Indeed, we can see all of Romans as an elaboration on the verse: The just (chapters 1-3) by faith (chapters 3-5) shall live (chapters 6-16). (This is the actual order of the words in this phrase in the Greek.) Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews

10:38 also quote this verse. Romans 1:17 stresses “the just” in contrast to the unjust or unrighteous, Galatians 3:11 stresses “by faith” instead of by works of law, and Hebrews 10:38-39 stresses “shall live” instead of death.

Not only does faith maintain the earthly existence of the righteous as Habakkuk emphasized but faith in God also brings eternal life. The man who is righteous through faith—the only way anyone can truly be righteous—will have life, both now and for eternity.

Footnotes

¹See H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 147.

²Charles Erdman, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 32.

³*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison, eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 1185.

II.

Universal Guilt

(1:18-3:20)

The universal need of God's righteousness

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Universal Guilt (1:18-3:20)

In order to explain justification by faith, Romans begins by demonstrating the universal guilt of mankind and the corresponding need of God's righteousness. First, the Gentiles have not followed God's law as revealed through nature and conscience. Second, the Jews also have failed to live in accordance with God's will, although God gave them a more complete revelation in the law of Moses. Thus all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In fact, the Old Testament has already attested to this truth. All men are sinners. Therefore, everyone is under the divine sentence of death for sin, and everyone needs God's righteousness in order to be saved.

A. Guilt of the Gentiles (1:18-32)

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. (20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, (21) because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and

their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. (24) Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, (25) who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator; who is blessed forever. Amen. (26) For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. (27) Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another; men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (28) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; (29) being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, (30) backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; (32) who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

In this discussion of man's sinfulness, Romans deals first with mankind in general—the pagans, the heathen, those who did not have the special revelation of the law—and describes their degradation. The Jews would readily

agree with this assessment and even many pagans would also, for pagan writers in Paul's day described in even greater and more repulsive detail every sin listed.

Verse 18. Just as the righteousness of God is revealed to the believer (1:17), so the wrath of God is revealed against the unbeliever. We should not associate divine wrath with the sinfulness that often accompanies human anger, such as vindictiveness, bitterness, or personal hatred. Rather, God's wrath is His judicial attitude in relation to sin. God's hatred of sin is a necessary part of His love for man, because sin damages, perverts, and destroys man. As explained in subsequent verses, God has revealed His wrath or judgment of sin through nature, conscience, and human history.

God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Ungodliness connotes impiety, irreverence, failure to serve God. Unrighteousness refers to all immorality and wickedness. By their evil, ungodly and unrighteous men hold down, hinder, or suppress the truth God has given them.

Verse 19. All men have God's truth available to them. There is a universal opportunity to know God, for God has manifested and shown His character to them. Chapters 1 and 2 establish that God has made truth plain to all through creation and conscience.

Verse 20. In particular, all have an opportunity to know two of God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and His Godhead (deity, divine nature)—from the visible creation. If the pagan will observe nature and reflect on it, he will realize that creation has a Creator. Furthermore, this Creator must have great power—in fact, He must be divine. By contemplating on God's creation, the

pagan can discover many aspects of God's character, such as wisdom, order, and goodness. In preaching to pagan audiences in Lystra and Athens, Paul used such reasoning from nature to lead them to the one God (Acts 14:14-17; 17:22-31), and this approach echoes the teaching of Psalm 19:1-6. Even if the pagan does not have the spoken or written Word of God, he has enough evidence in nature to convince him that God does exist, has supreme power, and is worthy of worship. Consequently, no human being has an excuse for failure to serve God. If a person will act on the knowledge of God available to him, by worshiping God and seeking after Him, God will lead him to a saving knowledge.

Despite the irrefutable evidence pointing to the Creator, the human race as a whole has turned away from Him and does not worship Him. The passage traces the falling away of mankind, which we categorize into five major steps for the sake of convenient analysis.

(1) Indifference to God.

Verse 21. Although men knew God existed, they did not glorify Him or thank Him for His providence. The first sins were refusal to worship and unthankfulness—in short, indifference to God. Because of this attitude, the people harbored vain, futile thoughts and began to lose the light they had. Their hearts were foolish, which here denotes lack of spiritual discernment or moral judgment (as in the Psalms and the Proverbs) rather than lack of intelligence. This verse enunciates a basic principle about truth: If one does not act on truth, he will lose it. If man refuses to walk in the light he possesses, that light will grow dim and then be extinguished. Eventually, he will live in darkness.

(2) Idolatry.

Verse 22. Ignoring the truth they had, men imagined and professed themselves to be wise in their foolish thoughts. They became proud of their own intellect.

Verse 23. This led to the foolish practice of idolatry. How could gods of inanimate wood and stone have created the world? How could crude representations of beasts have power over those living creatures themselves? How could idols deserve worship from the men who fashioned them? Yet when man ignored the truth about God he lost the understanding of God. He exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of mortal man, birds, animals, and even reptiles.

(3) Sexual impurity.

Verse 24. Idolatry led to uncleanness or sexual impurity. This pattern is apparent in the Old Testament, in the history of the Roman Empire, and in idolatrous cultures today. Ultimately, morality cannot be maintained without God. Belief in God is the only foundation for absolute morality; without God all moral judgments are relative, subjective, and uncertain.

Because of idolatry, "God gave them up. . . ." A form of this phrase appears three times in this passage. God did not force them to sin, but because of their sin He allowed them to go farther into sin. He no longer restrained them by divine grace but allowed them the "freedom" they demanded. Of course, this "freedom" to sin actually resulted in bondage to sin, degradation, and damnation.

Specifically, God gave them up to the sinful desires of their hearts. Without God as the source of morality, they began to indulge in sexual impurity, degrading their own bodies.

Verse 25. They exchanged the truth of God for the supreme lie, the worship of the Creator for the worship of the creature. Idolatry is the worship of created things, so worship of the body through lustful indulgence in sexual immorality is a logical development from idolatry. The idolater worships images of men and animals until finally he begins to worship his own body.

At this point Paul injected an inspired parenthetical expression of praise to the Creator. He is blessed forever! Amen (let it be so)! Paul at least would not be guilty of failure to glorify Him.

(4) Homosexuality.

Verse 26. Because men persisted in lusts, God gave them up to vile affections or shameful lusts. When man discards moral law, eventually nothing seems wrong to him. When man has indulged in his natural, sinful lusts without restraint, eventually he explores unnatural vices to satiate his jaded appetite. Widespread heterosexual impurity in a society leads to homosexuality.

Verse 27. The passage unambiguously describes lesbianism (verse 26) and male homosexuality (verse 27) and just as clearly categorizes them as sinful. It does not indicate that homosexual lusts can be “natural” for some people, but labels all such desires and activities as vile, unnatural, and shameful. Nature itself bears witness that homosexual desires and actions are sinful. In nature, the sexual drive exists for the sake of reproduction. The sexual relationship also helps to unite husband and wife in a lifelong marriage. This in turn creates the family unit and fulfills God’s original purpose in creating the woman as a companion and helper to the man (Genesis 2:18-25). Homosexuality provides for none of these things. From

the biblical, social, and biological points of view, homosexuality is unnatural and wrong.

This does not mean that an individual homosexual is necessarily more evil than any other sinner; he may retain a degree of morality in other areas. The increasing incidence of this sin is primarily an indication of the increasing breakdown of society as a whole, not just the individual. For example, the breakdown of the family is a factor in producing homosexual tendencies.

Those who participate in these indecent activities receive in themselves the due payment or penalty for their perversion. While “penalty” may refer to their spiritual judgment, here it more probably refers to physical and psychological penalties, such as sexually transmitted diseases and other medical problems caused by frequent abuse of the body in an unnatural way.

(5) Debased mind.

Verse 28. Finally, God gave them over to a mind that is debased (*NKJV*), reprobate (*KJV*), or depraved (*NIV*). The Greek word literally means “not standing the test, unqualified, worthless, base.” The distinctions between right and wrong are confused or lost. After indulging in all kinds of lusts, including unnatural lusts, men eventually lose even the morality taught by nature and conscience. They no longer even think the things they commit are wrong. Since they did not want to retain the knowledge of God, God allowed them to lose all sense of morality, which caused them to do all kinds of evil things.

In the context of this passage, *reprobate* does not mean one who has committed an unpardonable sin or who is beyond hope of salvation, for this chapter places the human race as a whole, particularly all the Gentiles,

in this category. Of course, once someone reaches the place where he loses the distinctions between right and wrong, he no longer knows enough to repent and be saved. He is incapable of listening to nature and conscience because his mind has been so distorted. It is still possible, however, for him to come to a realization of right and wrong through the preaching of the Word of God and the convicting power of the Spirit of God. This is, in fact, the hope for the human race today. Individuals who live in the sins described in this passage can still be saved from these sins. For example, the Corinthian church contained former idolaters, fornicators, and homosexuals (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

The passage lists sins characteristic of a debased society, many of which parallel the signs of the last days in II Timothy 3:1-9.

Verse 29.

- (1) Unrighteousness
- (2) Sexual immorality (omitted from the critical text)
- (3) Wickedness
- (4) Covetousness (greed)
- (5) Maliciousness (vicious disposition and desires)
- (6) Envy
- (7) Murder
- (8) Strife (not debate in the modern sense)
- (9) Deceit (guile—includes lying, defrauding, cheating)
- (10) Evil-mindedness (malignity)
- (11) Whisperers (gossipers, in a negative sense)

Verse 30.

- (12) Backbiters (slanderers, defamers)
- (13) Haters of God
- (14) Violent (or the Greek word can mean insolent)

- (15) Proud (arrogant)
- (16) Boasters
- (17) Inventors of evil things (inventors of ways of doing evil)

(18) Disobedient to parents

Verse 31.

(19) Undiscerning (senseless, without understanding)

(20) Untrustworthy (faithless, covenantbreaking)

(21) Unloving (heartless, without natural affection)

(22) Unforgiving (omitted from the critical text)

(23) Unmerciful (ruthless)

Verse 32. The world knows these things are wrong; one can derive this knowledge from natural law. Even the pagans know that those who practice these things deserve judgment and death. Every human society has laws or taboos, however imperfectly defined or observed, against many of these sins. For example, every human culture prohibits murder and disapproves of at least some forms of deceit, disobedience to parents, and untrustworthiness. In general, human societies have acknowledged the justice of the death penalty for at least some crimes. (For further discussion of the conscience and the loss of it, see the discussion at 2:15.)

Despite this original knowledge, people continue to practice these sins. To add insult to injury, they not only practice them but also approve of others who practice them. They take pleasure in and encourage the sins of others. For example, modern society openly approves of sexual immorality and violence in movies and on television.

This sinful progression is an accurate portrayal of human history from the Book of Genesis onward. In

fact, the Bible describes the last days as particularly evil (Matthew 24:5-24; II Timothy 3:1-9). The degenerative principle also applies in every society and every age. Occasionally in history, a society founded on high moral principles has emerged, but it has always followed this downward path. As a society breaks down morally, it becomes more and more conducive to the sins described. For this reason, many of these sins are more prevalent and more openly accepted in our day than in times past. For this reason, many of them are signs of the endtime.

This degenerative principle is evident in individual human lives as well. If a person refuses to walk in the light he has, he will grow progressively more sinful. It is impossible to stay the same after encountering truth; one either accepts it and draws closer to God or rejects it and strays farther from God. This does not necessarily mean every wayward individual will live out in detail every step or every sin listed, but the potential is certainly there.

In summary, we should note the logical nature of this progression; one stage leads naturally to the next. Furthermore, the progression is always downward. This downward progression into the depths of degradation begins with what may seem to be small sins: refusal to worship God and unthankfulness. People become depraved because they refuse to walk according to the light given them. Without the restraining grace of God, mankind never improves morally or even remains stable. If left alone by God, man will always fall deeper and deeper into sin.

Because the Gentiles forsook the knowledge of God, God did not restrain them from increasing sinfulness.

Consequently, the Gentile world stands guilty without excuse in the sight of God.

B. Guilt of the Jews (2:1-3:8)

After demonstrating the guilt of the Gentile world, Romans addresses those who agree with this analysis. The first half of chapter 2 speaks generally of anyone who judges the Gentiles as guilty but refuses to acknowledge his own guilt. In doing so, it establishes several important principles concerning the judgment of God.

The second half of chapter 2 applies these conclusions specifically to the Jew, demonstrating that the Jews are just as guilty as the Gentiles. The beginning of chapter 3 anticipates and briefly answers several objections to the affirmation of universal guilt, particularly Jewish guilt. A more thorough treatment of these objections is postponed until later in the book, after the full development of all the logical consequences of justification.

1. Principles of divine judgment (2:1-16)

(1) Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (2) But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. (3) And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God! (4) Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (5) But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath

in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (6) who "will render to each one according to his deeds": (7) eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; (8) but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, (9) tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; (10) but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (11) For there is no partiality with God. (12) For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (13) (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; (14) for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, (15) who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) (16) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Verse 1 describes the guilt of the judgmental man. If the Gentiles are without excuse for rejecting God and practicing sin, then so is the self-righteous man who condemns others for those sins while committing them himself. The sins listed in chapter 1 are so inclusive that everyone has been guilty of committing one or more of them. By condemning those who commit them, then, the judgmental man condemns himself and is without excuse.

Indeed, the most judgmental people are often the

most guilty. Those who obsessively condemn others for certain sins are often attempting to conceal their own weaknesses in those very areas.

Verse 2. God will not judge as we judge; He will judge according to truth. He will condemn *everyone* who sins. (See further discussion after verse 5.)

Verse 3. People have a tendency to excuse themselves for the very things they condemn in others. They readily identify sins in others and are quick to consider those sins as revelations of their basic evil character. When they commit the same sins, however, they often refuse to acknowledge them as sins. Even when they do, they tend to view them as justifiable, or at least understandable, exceptions to their basic good character. For example, when someone goes into a rage, people see him as undisciplined and hot-tempered, but the person justifies himself, reasoning that he was provoked unreasonably or had an unusually bad day.

Another human tendency is for a person to think that he is above the law of God simply because he acknowledges the law and professes allegiance to it. He thinks he will escape judgment because he is not ignorant of God's law or does not live in complete, open defiance of the law. He will not escape God's judgment, however, if his life does not measure up to his profession.

Preachers must be especially careful to practice what they preach, not allowing in themselves or condoning in their children what they disapprove of in others. Often the achievement of status, power, and success in religious circles deceives preachers and their family members into living as if they were no longer accountable. This is a satanic deception. Everyone is accountable to God. No

sinner will be excused or will escape God's judgment.

Verse 4. Everyone must repent—turn from sin to God. As Paul preached to the Athenians, God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). God does not demand of us something we cannot do. The riches of God's goodness, forbearance (a holding back of wrath, a delay of punishment), and longsuffering (patience) give us the opportunity to repent. Unfortunately, people often interpret this delay as an overlooking of sin or as a license to sin instead of a chance to repent (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

In particular, God's goodness leads people to repentance. This concept indicates that the grace of God precedes salvation, enabling a person to repent. God chooses us before we choose Him (John 15:16). This “prevenient grace” (grace that precedes salvation) is not bestowed only upon a select group, but it has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11), for God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11). This grace can be resisted, for the self-righteous person despises God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. He rejects the work of grace that leads to repentance.

Verse 5. Ironically, this hard-hearted, unrepentant person rejects true spiritual “riches” while “treasuring up” wrath to be revealed in the day of judgment. How sad that his only possession of eternal significance is divine wrath!

In demonstrating the guilt of the self-righteous man, this chapter enunciates several principles of divine judgment, which we discuss under five categories.

(1) *God's judgment is according to truth.* (See verse 2.) Human excuses, vain imaginings, and self-deception will not protect anyone from divine wrath. God will judge according to reality, in absolute truth and absolute justice.

(2) God's judgment will be according to deeds.

Verse 6. Paul quoted this principle from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12. God will repay everyone according to his works, not his privileges. He will judge on the basis of conduct rather than mere verbal profession, on performance rather than mere knowledge.

Does this contradict the doctrine of justification by faith, introduced in chapter 1 and expounded in chapters 3-4? Does chapter 2 actually teach justification by works? There is no contradiction here, just as there is no contradiction between the writings of Paul and James. (See Part III.)

First, this section does not present works as a basis of salvation but as a just basis of condemnation. No one will be excused on the basis of works; in fact, all are condemned on that basis (Romans 3:20). Only through faith in Christ do we obtain the righteousness God requires (Romans 3:22). In theory, if one lived perfectly without sin he would be righteous in God's sight. In practice, all have sinned (Romans 3:23), so God can judge no one righteous based on his works. Thus, the means of salvation is still faith in Christ. The believer receives imputed righteousness from Christ. God will judge the believer based on Christ's sinless life, not his past sinful record.

This emphasis on deeds does show us, however, that saving faith consists of more than "easy believism." Under divine inspiration Paul established that no one can be saved apart from doing good, but he waited until subsequent chapters to explain how one can do good, which is only by the life of faith. Salvation is designed to produce actual righteousness in our lives. It consists of sanctification as well as justification (Romans 2:7, 13; 8:4).

Faith that does not produce works is valueless. Genuine faith will always bear fruit in the form of good conduct.

Verse 7. The contrast here is not between salvation by works and condemnation by works but rather between two life choices: faith/obedience versus unbelief/disobedience. Those who patiently continue in faith—doing good, thereby seeking eternal glory, honor, and immortality—will inherit eternal life.

Verse 8. Those who do not obey the truth but are self-seeking and unrighteous will receive God's wrath and indignation (anger). (This is the correct word order in the Greek text.)

Verse 9. All evildoers will receive tribulation (affliction) and anguish. Judgment will come first to the Jew then to the Gentile, just as salvation did (Romans 1:16).

Verse 10. Those who do good will receive glory, honor, and peace. Both Jews and Gentiles can receive this reward.

If we are to harmonize the doctrine of judgment based on works in chapter 2 with the doctrine of justification by faith in chapter 3, we must recognize that faith and obedience are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed, "*Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.*"¹ We must realize that when Paul spoke of faith he had in mind "the obedience of faith." (See Romans 1:5; 16:26.)

In commenting on Romans 2:13, William Newell explained the equivalence of faith and obedience: "Nor does God in this verse say any will be justified by 'doing' (for He tells us plainly elsewhere that none will be), but He is saying here that doing, not mere hearing, is what His judgment calls for. We shall find that the gospel will speak

of the 'obedience of faith': whereas disobedience and unbelief are interchangeable words."² W. H. Griffith Thomas quoted G. Campbell Morgan with approval: "Works will be the final test of judgment. Faith which does not produce these is declared to be useless . . . Godliness as privileged relationship is of no value except as it produces actual righteousness."³ Thomas also quoted F. Godet with approval: "Faith is not the dismal prerogative of being able to sin with impunity; it is, on the contrary, the means of overcoming sin, and acting holily; and if this life-fruit is not produced, it is dead, and will be declared vain."⁴

This passage of Scripture shows us the importance of actually dealing with sin in our lives—first, by seeking to prevent sin and, second, by repenting of any sin we commit. (See I John 2:1-2.) Mental faith alone or a onetime decision of faith alone will not suffice. Chapter 2 teaches that God will judge us on the basis of whether or not our lives are actually holy. Subsequent chapters will teach that faith is the only means by which we can overcome sin and live holy lives.

(3) God's judgment will be impartial.

Verse 11. God will judge everyone fairly and without favoritism. Both Jews and Gentiles have the same choice between salvation and condemnation (verses 9-10). God will not overlook the sins of His people; in fact, He judges them first! (I Peter 4:17).

(4) God's judgment will be according to available light.

Verse 12. God will not judge someone by a standard he did not have, but God will judge everyone according to the light he had. God will judge all sinners. If they did not have the law, God will not judge them by the law, but He

will judge them for sinning against the truth they did have. Those who had the law will be judged for their disobedience of the law.

Verse 13. Again, the passage emphasizes that it is not merely those who hear and know the law who will be justified, but those who actually perform what is required. God will base judgment on the reality of performance and not on empty profession.

Verse 14. Those who did not have the law will be judged by natural law (the law of conscience). Every society on earth has some concept of morality, and all men have some knowledge of good and evil. Since man was created in God's image, he retains to some degree an instinctive sense of morality, and this distinguishes him from animals. Even the nature of man itself, then, contains some moral guidance. Although the Gentiles did not have the law of Moses, by nature they acknowledged and performed truths contained in the law of Moses. These truths have become a law to them.

Verse 15. The works of the law (the requirements of the law) are to some extent written on the heart of every person in the form of conscience. Conscience will stand as a witness against every individual. The instinctive teaching of conscience causes him to think about his actions, and those thoughts will either accuse him or defend him for each action. Either way man has some idea of moral law. If his thoughts accuse him, he acknowledges guilt for violating moral law. If his thoughts defend him, he acknowledges a need to justify himself in light of moral law and he acknowledges a standard to which he can appeal, namely, moral law. Conscience and reason, both in the individual and in the collective society, establish moral law.

Although conscience alone is not sufficient to instruct us in all the will of God, conscience does teach us some of God's will. Even the worst sinners have some degree of knowledge in this area. Those who have no specific revelation of God's will still have the law of conscience and will be judged for disobedience of conscience.

This does not mean anyone will be saved solely on the basis of strict adherence to the law of conscience. Whether judged by law or by conscience all stand condemned, for all have sinned (Romans 3:20, 23). No one has ever lived up to even the minimum demands of conscience. Conscience, then, will serve only as a just basis of condemnation for those who had no further revelation of God's will.

No one can be saved outside the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 14:6; II Thessalonians 1:7-10). Those who have never heard the gospel have still violated the law of conscience. Therefore, they are sinners and need a savior. As Romans 1 indicates, if they will worship God and seek Him to the extent of their knowledge of Him through nature and conscience, God will lead them to a saving knowledge of the truth. (See Jeremiah 29:13-14; Hebrews 11:6.) The story of Cornelius in Acts 10-11 is a good example of how God miraculously provided the means for a diligent seeker to hear the message of salvation.

The principle of judgment according to light available coupled with the principle of judgment according to deeds implies that not everyone will suffer the same intensity of punishment. All sinners will inherit eternal death (separation from God) and people cannot save themselves by good works or good moral living, but apparently the degree of punishment they receive will

depend on how much light (opportunity, knowledge) they had and how disobedient they were to that light. A sinner who constantly and deliberately violated his conscience will receive greater divine wrath than one who attempted to live up to the demands of conscience in most respects. Those who followed conscience in certain areas will be excused in those areas. (Many other passages of Scripture indicate differing degrees of punishment based on works and available light: Matthew 12:43-45; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 12:42-48; II Peter 2:20-22.)

As verse 12 points out, sin is the cause of death. Sin is transgression of law or lawlessness (I John 3:4). Whether one sins against the law of conscience or against the supernaturally revealed law of God, he will perish.

Modern psychology contributes some interesting observations relevant to the discussion of conscience as well as the earlier description in chapter 1 of the loss of conscience. Here are the words of Jerome Kagan, noted psychologist, professor of human development at Harvard University, and author of numerous books, including *The Nature of the Child*:

We [falsely] think that we have to teach a child a conscience, even though research shows that in the second year all children develop a moral sense. Of course the specific acts they regard as right or wrong have to be taught. But the child is prepared by biology to be sensitive to right and wrong, as a bird is prepared to sing and a fish prepared to swim. . . . He [the 18-year-old delinquent] had a conscience, but experiences after age 2 caused him to lose his ability to experience guilt and shame for committing an asocial act. When children are 2, they experience special emotion when they contemplate doing something wrong or when they actually do it. . . . Some children, as a func-

tion of the neighborhoods in which they live, the homes in which they survive, the television and movies that they watch, gradually lose this feeling. It's then that they act antisocially.⁵

(5) God's judgment will uncover the secrets of men.

Verse 16. We can hide nothing from God. In the judgment God will uncover even the most secret of unrepent-
ed sins and judge them.

God will perform all judgment through Jesus Christ, for Jesus is the visible, bodily manifestation of God's fullness (Colossians 2:9). The saints will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10). The wicked will stand before Jesus Christ at the great white throne judgment (Acts 10:42).

Paul wrote that judgment will come "according to my gospel," that is, "as my gospel declares." Paul did not designate the gospel as his private doctrine or interpretation, but he had such an intense burden and love for the gospel message that he could rightfully claim it as belonging to him. Every person needs to identify with the gospel to the point that it becomes his personally.

In summary, Romans 2:1-16 proclaims the certainty of judgment, the universality of judgment, the principles of judgment, and the results of judgment. There is no escape, even for—especially for—the self-righteous, judgmental sinner.

2. Application to the Jews (2:17-29)

(17) Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, (18) and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out

of the law, (19) and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, (20) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. (21) You, therefore, who teach another; do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? (22) You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (23) You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? (24) For "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. (25) For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. (26) Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? (27) And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? (28) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; (29) but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Romans 2:17-29 deals with the specific case of the Jews. Verses 1-16 build the case against self-righteous Jews, then verse 17 actually names them. We can also view verses 1-16 as a statement of principles and verses 17-29 as a specific application. God will judge the Jew according to truth (reality) and according to deeds, not mere profession. God will be impartial; He will not let the

sinning Jew escape just because he is a Jew and has the law. God will judge the Jew by the light he has; namely, his obedience to the law. God will uncover the hypocrisy of the self-righteous Jew.

Verse 17. According to the critical text, the opening word is actually *but if* instead of *indeed* or *behold*.

This section begins by describing the exalted position and great opportunities available to the Jew. It envisions the typical Jew of that day who rejected the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ. Such a Jew has the law and puts his trust in it. He boasts of his position in God.

Verse 18. He knows God's will, approves of excellent things, and has been instructed in the law.

Verse 19. He is in a position to teach others. He is confident of his ability to guide the blind and enlighten dark hearts.

Verse 20. He is confident of his ability to instruct the immature because of the knowledge and truth he has.

Verse 21. Superior positions, however, bring superior responsibilities, and great opportunities bring great obligations. The Jew who does not put faith in God is guilty of not fulfilling these responsibilities and obligations, because he disobeys the very truth that made him special. He teaches others but does not teach himself.

Verses 21-23 describe the hypocrisy of such a Jew. These verses show him to be guilty of the same kind of sins as the Gentiles in chapter 1. First, he is guilty of sins against others, such as theft.

Verse 22. He also commits sins against self, such as adultery, and sins against God, such as robbing temples. The *KJV* says "commit sacrilege"; the literal rendering is "rob temples." This probably means diverting offerings

pledged or given for sacred use in the synagogue or Temple.

Verse 23. This type of Jew brags of his special relationship with God and is convinced of his ability to lead and enlighten those who are spiritually ignorant and immature, but does not himself live according to his knowledge of the truth. He teaches others the law, but violates those precepts himself, thereby dishonoring God.

Verse 24. This Jewish inconsistency leads Gentiles to reject God and even to blaspheme God's name. The quotation is from Isaiah 52:5 and apparently includes part of Ezekiel 36:22 as well. This has a powerful application to us today. We, the "People of the Name," will actually give occasion for sinners to blaspheme the name of Jesus if we do not walk worthy of His name. It is not enough to take on the name of Jesus in baptism; we must truly bear His name in every part of life.

Verse 25 uses the distinguishing physical mark of the Jew—circumcision—as an example to make the point clear. Circumcision was an outward sign, but the Jew had to manifest the faith and obedience it symbolized. Circumcision was the seal of God's covenant with Israel, but the Jew had to fulfill the actual covenant requirements. If the Jew kept the law, circumcision was valuable; but if the Jew broke the law, circumcision was valueless.

Verse 26. Furthermore, if an uncircumcised Gentile follows the righteous requirements of the law, God will reward him as though he were a circumcised Jew. God will count his obedience as circumcision.

Verse 27. In fact, the righteous Gentile will even stand in judgment against the Jew who did not obey the law.

Verse 28. In short, if a man has only the outward sign

of circumcision he is not truly a Jew in God's sight.

Verse 29. The true Jew is one inwardly—one who is circumcised of heart, one who has separated from or cut away sin. He does not merely have the written law, but he has been circumcised by the Spirit and possesses the law of the Spirit written in his heart.

The Old Testament firmly supports Paul's definition of the true Jew. Many passages teach the necessity of being circumcised of heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 9:26; Ezekiel 44:7-9) and teach the futility of adherence to the letter only without faith from the heart, which includes obedience (Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-19; Micah 6:6-8).

The true Jew is not the one who receives recognition and praise from men, but one who receives praise and approval from God. It is interesting to note in this context that the word *Jew* comes from "Judah," meaning "praise."

Note: The roles of Jewish circumcision and Christian baptism

Romans, 2:25-29 does not mean circumcision was unnecessary for a Jew under the Old Covenant. If a Jewish male was not circumcised physically, he was cut off from his people, unable to participate in the Passover, and subject to the divine penalty of death (Genesis 17:10, 14; Exodus 4:24-26; 12:43-44; Joshua 5:2-9). If a Jew refused circumcision, he certainly manifested unbelief and disobedience, but mere circumcision alone did not guarantee that he had the obedient faith necessary for salvation. Furthermore, God honored the obedient faith of uncircumcised Gentiles, to whom he had given no command to be circumcised. Under the New Covenant, God abolished the

requirement of physical circumcision (Galatians 5:6; 6:15). Today we receive salvation through obedient faith—by circumcision of heart, without physical circumcision.

“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (I Corinthians 7:19). Circumcision itself conferred no grace; it was necessary only because God commanded it. Since God does not command Christians under the New Covenant to be circumcised, it does not matter, but keeping God’s commands still does matter and always will. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). God no longer requires circumcision of His people, but He still requires faith that works. Faith works by love, which means faith is always obedient for, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). These three verses equate keeping God’s commandments with working faith and with new life in Christ. An obedient faith in Christ is what counts.

Colossians 2:11-12 compares Christian baptism to circumcision. This does not imply that baptism is unnecessary, but instead indicates that baptism under the New Covenant is at least as significant as circumcision under the Old Covenant. Water baptism is of no avail unless accompanied by obedient faith, repentance, circumcision of heart. The physical ceremony is of no value without the inner spiritual work. Since God’s Word commands water baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), a refusal to be baptized manifests unbelief and disobedience.

Just as the true Jew has always been one who was circumcised spiritually, so the true Christian is one who is born again spiritually. Birth into a Christian family, a verbal profession of faith, the ceremony of baptism, participation in sacraments or other rituals, officially joining a church—none of these things can make one a Christian. The true Christian is a spiritual Jew who has been spiritually circumcised. He has died to sin in repentance, been buried with Christ in baptism, and has risen to walk in newness of life with the indwelling Spirit of Christ (Romans 6:1-4). The new birth, which involves baptism of water and Spirit, is a spiritual circumcision, which cuts away the sins of the old man and initiates the believer into new life in the Spirit (Colossians 2:11-13).

3. Answers to objections (3:1-8)

(1) What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? (2) Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. (3) For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? (4) Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged." (5) But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) (6) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? (7) For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? (8) And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

The conciseness of this passage and the difficulty of the traditional *KJV* phrasing make it hard to understand. Other translations are particularly helpful here.

At this point in the discussion the inspired Paul foresaw some challenges to this teaching, particularly from the Jews, who might see Romans 2:25-29 as a denial of Jewish uniqueness as God's chosen people. In a characteristically Pauline manner, this passage raises the anticipated objections, briefly answers them in order to gain a continued hearing for the case, then defers further discussion to a more suitable place in the logical development of the argument.

Romans 3:1-8, then, is actually a digression from the main line of thought in this part of the epistle. We treat the passage as consisting of four closely related objections.

(1) What advantage does the Jew have?

Verse 1. This objection is understandable in light of the teaching that a circumcised Jew could fail to have God's approval while an uncircumcised Gentile could receive the same approval as a Jew. If this is true, what is the value of circumcision? The doctrine enunciated in chapter 2 seemingly undercuts God's designation of Israel as a chosen nation and God's commandment for the Jew to be circumcised.

Verse 2. Instead of responding that Jewishness was of no value, this verse replies that the Jew had many advantages in every way. First and foremost, God entrusted the Jews with His oracles. (Other Jewish advantages are listed in Romans 9:4-5.) The Jews had the supreme treasure of God's Word. They did have greater privileges, but of course this entailed greater responsibilities.

The word *oracles* means "divine words or divine ut-

terances,” and in this context it clearly refers to the Old Testament. This designation reveals the exalted nature of the inspiration of Scripture. If the Scriptures are actually the written utterances of God, then inspiration must extend to every word.

(2) Does Jewish unbelief nullify God’s faithfulness?

Verse 3. If some Jews did not believe God, as Romans 2 indicates, would not this negate God’s promises to them in the Old Testament, thereby making God unfaithful? Since chapter 2 charges that the Jews have not obeyed the Word, accordingly they have not believed the Word. In this case, is not the supposed advantage of having the Word actually nullified? The thrust of this objection is to force one of two conclusions: Either the assertion of Jewish unbelief is wrong, or the doctrine of Romans does in fact destroy Jewish uniqueness as established by God and makes God unfaithful.

Verse 4. Paul answered this objection by his favorite expression of emphatic denial: “Certainly not!” (The *KJV* translates this as “God forbid,” but the Greek phrase does *not* contain a reference to God.)

Man’s unbelief cannot destroy God’s faithfulness. God’s Word is true, even when this means every man is a liar. In fact, man’s unfaithfulness actually makes God’s faithfulness, more evident. In stating this claim, Romans 3:4 quotes Psalm 51:4. That psalm is David’s prayer of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. In verse 3 he confessed his sin, and in verse 4 he acknowledged that his sin served to demonstrate how just and blameless God is. Romans 3:4 speaks as if God’s manner of judgment itself were on trial. It concludes that man’s sin proves God’s Word to be right and vindicates His judgment. Far from

destroying God's Word, then, Jewish unfaithfulness only serves to highlight the faithfulness of God.

Romans 9-11 deals in greater detail with these first two objections and other questions related to them.

(3) If man's sin brings out God's righteousness more clearly, how can God justly punish man for sin?

Verse 5. This objection arises out of the answer to the preceding objection. If man's sin actually brings greater glory to God, is God unfair to condemn that sin?

This objection is so weak and blasphemous that Paul felt compelled to note parenthetically, "I am using a human argument" (*NIV*).

Verse 6. Again he replied emphatically: "Certainly not!" The verse disposes of the argument quickly by pointing out that if it were valid God could not judge the world. It is taken for granted that Paul's opponents believed God will indeed judge the world in the last day, and of course the Old Testament clearly teaches this truth.

The implication of the foregoing reply is this: Just because God can make good come out of evil, that does not justify the commission of evil. Sin is evil in itself and if left to itself will never lead to good results. For example, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of sinful motives of hatred, envy, and greed. God turned Joseph's sojourn in Egypt into a means of salvation for his family, but that did not mitigate the guilt of his brothers. If they had not sinned, God would have still blessed Joseph and brought deliverance to the family. If God had not intervened, the consequences of their sin would have been disastrous for the whole family. God brought good out of the situation despite the brothers' sin, not because of their sin.

Verse 7 restates the objection by personalizing it: If my lie highlights God's truth and brings greater glory to Him, how can God still condemn me for my sin? If I have done God a favor, how can he punish me for it? This leads directly to the last objection.

(4) Why not do evil that good may come?

Verse 8. This objection is the logical extension of the preceding one, and it holds that the end justifies the means. In other words, if the end result is good it does not matter that the means to the end are evil. For example, this false doctrine would allow one to lie for a worthy cause or to violate other biblical ethics when convenient to do so in a particular situation. If our sin demonstrates God's grace, then cannot and should not we sin all the more?

Some slanderously reported that Paul taught this, and some affirmed this to be his doctrine. Perhaps some deliberately distorted Paul's teaching to discredit him, while others cited him as authority in actually teaching this doctrine themselves.

Even today many distort the doctrine of justification by faith, using it to teach that the grace of God automatically covers the "believer" even though he continues to live in sin. The doctrines of situation ethics (standards of morality are not absolute but change according to circumstances), "easy believism" (salvation by mental faith without genuine repentance and obedience), and "once saved always saved" (unconditional eternal security in this life regardless of habitual, unrepented sin) actually encourage people to stay in sin. By supposedly being saved while continuing to live in sin, they supposedly demonstrate the grace and mercy of God.

Romans 3:8 rejects the doctrine that the end justifies the means, the doctrine that the believer can continue to sin to bring greater glory to God. Those who claim that Paul taught this deserve the condemnation they will receive.

Romans 6 deals further with the implications of these last two objections.

C. Conclusion: The Whole World Is Guilty (Romans 3:9-20)

(9) What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. (10) As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; (11) there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. (12) They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (13) "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; (14) "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." (15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) destruction and misery are in their ways; (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (19) Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 1:18-3:8 proclaims the guilt of both Jews and Gentiles and answers Jewish counterarguments. Romans

3:9-20 states and proves from Scripture the conclusion of the matter: The whole world is guilty before God.

Verse 9. In light of the evidence of Jewish sin, the Jews were no better than the Gentiles. Although God did entrust the Jews with greater spiritual privileges and treasures, both Jews and Gentiles are equally sinful in the sight of God. With respect to standing before God, no one is superior to anyone else. All are under sin.

This analysis understands the question of verse 9 to mean, “Are we Jews better than the Gentiles?” Some commentators interpret the meaning as, “Are we Jews bettered by the Gentiles?” or “Are we (writer and readers) better than the sinful Gentiles and Jews?” In any case, the conclusion still stands.

The phrase “under sin” appears also in Galatians 3:22, and Romans 7:14 uses “sold under sin.” This phrase refers to more than just the commission of sinful acts. It expresses that the entire human race has fallen under the dominion of sin and every human being has come under the control of the sinful nature.

Verse 10. To prove this assertion Paul quoted a number of Old Testament passages (Romans 3:10-18). These quotations demonstrate man’s evil character, his evil conduct (in speech and actions), and the root of his evil (no fear of God).

We can itemize the charges in nine categories. The first six are quoted from Psalm 14:1-3, which is itself repeated fully in Psalm 53:1-3 and partially in Ecclesiastes 7:20. The other quotations are identified below.

(1) Unrighteousness

Verse 11.

(2) Lack of spiritual understanding

(3) Failure to seek God

Verse 12.

(4) Turning away from God (apostasy)

(5) Unprofitability (worthlessness)

(6) Refusal to do good

Verse 13.

(7) Sins of the tongue, including deceit and poisonous speech (Psalm 5:9; 140:3)

Verse 14. The sins of the tongue also include cursing and bitterness (Psalm 10:7).

Verse 15.

(8) Violence (Isaiah 59:7-8). The violent spirit manifests itself in an eagerness to shed blood.

Verse 16. It causes destruction and misery.

Verse 17. It causes men not to follow peace.

Verse 18.

(9) No fear of God (no reverence or respect for God and His law) (Psalm 36:1)

The first six charges (Romans 3:10-12) apply to the whole human race in the unregenerate state. No one is righteous in God's sight, for all have sinned. No one has spiritual understanding, no one follows God's ways completely, no one is profitable to Him, no one practices total goodness. In fact, no one even seeks after God. As Romans 1:18-32 depicted, man if left alone by God never seeks after God but always grows progressively more sinful. As Romans 2:4 pointed out, God's goodness is necessary to lead man to repentance.

In Romans 3:11 we see once again the necessity of prevenient grace (the grace that precedes salvation). God has manifested His grace to all mankind, drawing people to Himself and enabling them to seek after Him and to

repent from sin. Without this divine work, none of us would even seek after God to worship Him and live for Him.

Verse 19. Not all the charges listed in chapter 3 apply equally to all individuals, just as not all Gentiles are guilty of every sin in chapter 1 and not all Jews are guilty of every sin in chapter 2. When read in their original contexts, the passages quoted in Romans 3:13-18 apparently refer to specific groups of people rather than to the entire human race. Nevertheless, these are examples of the sinfulness of mankind. These examples have particular relevance to the Jews and to anyone else who accepts the Old Testament. God must have intended for these passages to have specific relevance for those to whom He gave the Old Testament.

Interestingly, verse 19 uses the term *law* to cover all these Old Testament quotations. The Hebrews originally classified the entire Old Testament in two divisions—Law and Prophets—and then later in three divisions—Law (the five books of Moses), Prophets (history, major prophets, minor prophets), and Writings (poetry, wisdom literature, miscellaneous). Many Jews regarded the books of Moses as superior to the other books, while the Samaritans rejected all but the five books of the Law. The use of the term *law* to describe quotations from Psalms and Isaiah indicates that all of the Old Testament books are equally inspired. The Prophets and the Writings are just as inspired as the original Law.

Romans 3:19-20 brings the first great doctrinal section of the epistle to a close. These verses are apparently based on Psalm 143:2. They enunciate two profound conclusions:

(1) *The whole world is guilty before God.* All have sinned and have no excuse, all are guilty, all need God's righteousness. (Romans 3:23 restates this truth.)

(2) *No one can be justified by the deeds of the law.*

Verse 20. Galatians 2:16 and 3:11 also state this truth. No one can be saved on the basis of good works or strict observance of law. No sin can be acquitted by law. No one can be saved by law, whether the law of conscience or the written law.

How does this second conclusion follow from the preceding discussion of man's sinfulness? First, it is evident by observation. The Gentiles had the law of conscience and the Jews had the law of Moses, but in neither case did law prevent their sin or save them from sin.

Second, it is evident by studying the nature and purpose of law itself. The law does not forgive the lawbreaker—it condemns him. No amount of present adherence to law or performance of good works will compensate for or erase past violations of the law. Since all men have broken God's law, the law cannot bless but can only condemn.

To make this last point clear, verse 20 mentions the purpose of the law, explained more fully in Romans 5:20 and 7:7-13. It answers this potential question or objection: If law cannot acquit man of sin, what is its purpose? The law does not mediate or save, but it imparts the knowledge of sin.

It does so in at least three ways: (1) Law shows man what sin is. (2) It shows man he is a sinner. (3) It shows man his need of salvation. Through the law, man becomes aware of the definition of sin, the consequences of sin, and the existence of his own sinful nature. Man begins to

realize that in his own power he cannot measure up to God's holy and just requirements. Ultimately, the law proves to man that he cannot attain righteousness without divine grace. It is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

Footnotes

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2nd ed., R. H. Fuller, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 69, emphasis in original.

²William Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938), p. 63.

³W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 82, quoting G. Campbell Morgan, *The Analyzed New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 27-29.

⁴Thomas, p. 82, quoting F. Godet, *Commentary on the Romans*, I, 196.

⁵Jerome Kagan, "'Your Mother Did it to You' is an Excuse Americans Overuse," *U. S. News & World Report*, March 25, 1985, pp. 63-64.

III.

Justification by Faith

(3:21-5:21)

The means of receiving God's righteousness

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Justification by Faith (3:21-5:21)

After demonstrating both from observation and from Scripture the universal guilt of mankind, the Book of Romans proclaims God's provision and solution for the human dilemma. First, it states the doctrine of justification by faith based on the atoning work of Jesus Christ and draws some important inferences. Then, it proves the doctrine from the Hebrew Scriptures. After establishing the doctrine, it describes the benefits of justification both in this life and for eternity. The section concludes by contrasting Adam and Christ, thereby showing the universal application of the justification principle. Galatians 2-4 also discusses justification by faith and makes many of the same points.

A. The Doctrine Explained (3:21-31)

This is one of the most doctrinally significant passages of the entire book. It states the central doctrine of the epistle—justification by faith—and develops some important logical consequences of that doctrine. After discussing this passage we will insert a note on saving faith, because a proper understanding of faith is essential to understanding the doctrine of justification by faith.

1. The doctrine stated (3:21-26)

(21) But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (22) even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (25) whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, (26) to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Verse 21. Having concluded that all men are under sin (Romans 3:9-20), the epistle explains God's way of righteousness, which alone can bring salvation to sinful man. This way of righteousness does not come by law. The Greek text does not have the definite article "the" before the first occurrence of the word *law* in verse 21. This indicates that the reference is to the principle of law. Law reveals sin, but it does not cleanse from sin or make one righteous. We receive God's righteousness apart from law. The Book of Romans did not introduce a new way of salvation. To the contrary, "the Law and the Prophets"—a Hebrew designation for the Old Testament—testified to the way of salvation that Romans explains.

Verse 22. This righteousness from God comes *dia pisteos Iesou Christou*, that is, "through faith in Jesus Christ." "Through faith" signifies that faith is the means or instrument by which we receive righteousness. "In

Jesus Christ” signifies that Jesus Christ is the object of our faith, not that we have Christ’s faith, as one might interpret from the *KJV* rendering, “by faith of Jesus Christ.”

God’s righteousness comes to all who believe. (The critical text omits the words “and on all.”) The Greek uses the present participle, which indicates continuous present action, so it literally says, “all those believing.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* notes, “The present participle makes it clear that this is a life-long committal to Christ seen in the day-by-day response of trust.”¹

The last clause of verse 22 is linked with verse 23. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in the manner of receiving God’s righteousness, for all have sinned.

Verse 23 recapitulates the preceding section by asserting that every individual has sinned and is guilty before God. (See I Kings 8:46; II Chronicles 6:36.) We find the present participle again in the second half of the verse, so it could read all “are falling short” of God’s glory. Everyone is continually failing to obtain God’s glory, everyone is failing to measure up to God’s original plan or ideal for man. This does not mean everyone has sinned in an equal manner. From a human perspective, some commit more numerous sins and more terrible sins than others. From God’s perspective, however, any sin is enough to separate us completely from His holy presence. It is like a group of people attempting to jump to the moon. One athlete in the group may jump much higher than the others, but from a celestial point of view even his efforts are pathetically inadequate.

Verse 24. What happens to the sinner who places faith

in Jesus Christ? He is justified. The word *justified* is a legal term denoting right standing or vindication in the eyes of the law. In the context of this verse, the verb “to justify” means “to count as righteous, to declare righteous.” God declares the believer to be righteous and therefore entitled to all privileges of that status, including eternal salvation. God removes the guilt and condemnation of sin. He removes sin’s stain both from His records and from man’s conscience. “A man who has faith is now freely acquitted in the eyes of God by his generous dealing in the Redemptive Act of Jesus Christ” (*Phillips*).

We should regard the new birth as a unitary, integrated experience, which stands at the beginning of the salvation process, and we should view justification as an instantaneous event coinciding with the new birth and standing at the beginning of a life of faith. God declares us to be righteous and treats us as righteous from the new birth onward. Of course, continued justification is necessary for sinful acts committed after the new birth. Justification does not mean we actually *become* fully righteous at that time. Becoming righteous is the process of sanctification, which begins at the new birth and continues until the Lord comes for us. At Christ’s coming, God will bestow upon us absolute, sinless perfection, and we will actually *be* completely righteous in fact as well as in standing.

Justification comes freely. It comes through faith, not works or legal obedience. Justification is not merited, earned, or deserved. The source of justification is the grace of God. Grace is the unmerited favor of God towards man.

Verse 24 describes our salvation in terms of redemp-

tion. Redemption means complete deliverance by paying a price. It refers to buying a slave out of bondage in order to set him free. The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament before the time of Christ) used the same Greek word *apolutrosis* to translate the Hebrew word for kinsman redeemer in Leviticus 25:47-49. According to that passage, if someone sold himself into slavery to pay his debts, a near kinsman could redeem him (buy back his freedom). God manifested Himself in the flesh through Jesus Christ so that He could become our brother (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:17) and therefore our kinsman redeemer.

Verse 25 describes Christ's saving work as a propitiation. Propitiation is something that allows God to act mercifully or forgivingly. It is a sacrifice of atonement; something that turns aside God's wrath and takes away sin; an appeal of divine wrath; a satisfaction of divine justice. The Septuagint used the same Greek word *hilasterion* as its translation of the "mercy seat." The mercy seat was the golden lid of the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the Tabernacle. Once every year the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people. Thus, the word *propitiation* here can mean the "place of atonement."

Jesus Christ is our means of receiving God's forgiveness and mercy; He is our mercy seat or place of atonement. Since God is holy and just, He cannot overlook sin or have fellowship with sinful man. God's nature requires that man's sin result in separation from Him. Eternal separation from God is the ultimate spiritual death (Revelation 20:14), so the principles of divine justice require death for sin (Romans 6:23). God's love and mercy,

however, sought to restore man to fellowship with God. God's grace provided a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin through the death of the sinless man Jesus Christ. Christ took our place and suffered the penalty of sin in our stead. If we believe in Christ and what He did for us, then His work becomes effective in our lives. Christ's death met the requirements of God's justice, enabling God to pardon our sin without violating His holy nature and His Word.

Christ's death is indeed an appeasement or a turning away of divine wrath. It was not to make God love us, but it happened because He loved us (John 3:16). It revealed both His hatred of sin and His mercy for the sinner. It was not an appeasement offering by sinful man or by a second deity; God Himself provided the sacrifice. (See Genesis 22:8; Isaiah 59:16; 63:5.) God publicly presented the man Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. (See Hebrews 10:1-20.)

Christ is our propitiation "by his blood, through faith." These are two independent clauses in the Greek, not one clause as it might appear from the *KJV* rendering, "through faith in his blood." In other words, the propitiation is effective because of two things: blood and faith. The propitiation itself came by the blood of Christ. We apply the propitiation to our lives through faith.

The basis of justification, then, is the blood of Christ. Blood is essential to life; it supplies life-sustaining oxygen and nutrients to all the body. "The life of the flesh is in the blood . . . it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life" (Leviticus 17:11, 14). The shedding of blood represents life given up in death. The blood of Christ represents the sinless life that He lived on earth and voluntarily

gave up on the cross. The blood of Christ stands for the death of Christ.

The propitiatory death of Christ serves to manifest God's righteousness in a twofold way. First, it shows God was acting justly when he temporarily overlooked sins committed in the past. Although the *KJV* uses the word *remission*, the Greek word is *paresis*, "a passing over," rather than *aphesis*, "remission or forgiveness." The reference here is to sins before the cross. In the Old Testament God forgave sin and justified men, treating them as righteous even though no one had paid the penalty for sin. In His patience He seemingly ignored their sin. (See Acts 17:30.) This creates a theological problem: It is just as wrong to justify the wicked as it is to condemn the just (Proverbs 17:15). Since it is unjust to ignore a wrong, how could God overlook sin and still be just?

Christ's death justified God in this area. That is, it vindicated God's justice; it showed or declared God to be righteous. It demonstrated that God had not ignored human sin and was not indifferent to it, but did require the penalty of sins to be paid.

God does not live in time as we do. He knows the future with certainty and can treat things that do not exist as though they did exist (Romans 4:17). He forgave sin and justified men in the Old Testament in patient anticipation of the cross. He could act upon that future event because He had predestined it before the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:18-20). He showed mercy in anticipation of the demonstration of His righteousness at Calvary.

No one in ages past could have been saved without Calvary. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22), and the blood of animals could not

suffice to take away the sins of man (Hebrews 10:4). The Old Testament sacrifices did not actually forgive or remit sin, but only atoned for sin temporarily. The Hebrew word for atonement, *kaphar*, literally means “a covering.” The sins were covered from God’s sight, waiting to be dealt with permanently by the cross. The Old Testament saints expressed their faith in God by obeying His command to offer blood sacrifices for their sins. In actuality, Christ’s death took away their sins, and His work was made effective in their lives by their obedient faith in God.

Verse 26. The first purpose of Christ’s death, then, is to justify God—to demonstrate God’s righteousness. It shows God was righteous in His dealings with sin before the cross. It also shows God is righteous in forgiving sin now. He does not forget about sin or pardon it contrary to His stated principles of justice, but He exacted full payment at Calvary.

The second purpose of Christ’s death is to justify man—to declare the believer righteous. It enables God to be the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus. Christ’s death is a redemption and a propitiation that provides man a means of salvation.

In summary, Romans 3:21-26 is one of the key passages of the Book of Romans and indeed of the entire Bible. It explains the fundamental principles of salvation for all mankind and enunciates the doctrine of justification by faith: on the basis of Christ’s death, God freely declares sinners to be righteous through their faith in Jesus Christ. The passage describes God’s provision of salvation from three points of view: in terms of the courtroom we are justified (declared righteous), in terms of the slave market we are redeemed (delivered by a price paid),

in terms of the temple we have a propitiation (a sacrifice of atonement or a place of atonement).

2. Inferences drawn from the doctrine (3:27-31)

(27) Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. (28) Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (29) Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, (30) since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (31) Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

From the statement of the doctrine of justification by faith, three conclusions follow:

(1) Justification by faith excludes boasting.

Verse 27. Here, the word *law* means “a principle.” Since man’s salvation is based on the principle of faith, not the principle of works, no man can boast of his salvation. Our salvation is based on the work of the One in whom we have faith, not on our works. Our salvation comes by “believing instead of achieving” (*Phillips*).

Verse 28. The word *conclude* here means “to reckon.” This verse does not proclaim justification by faith as a new conclusion, but uses it to show the reason why boasting is excluded.

The verse restates the doctrine of justification by faith in clear terms: God counts us righteous because of our faith in Him, not because of good works or strict adherence to law. We are justified “apart from the deeds of the law.” We cannot earn salvation in any way. God does not

reward our good works or our holiness by granting salvation. We do not live holy in order to be saved; we live holy because we are saved. We do not work to salvation; we work from salvation. We do not “get good to get God”; we “get God to get good.” As long as we continue to walk by faith we have assurance of salvation.

This does not imply that we can live disobediently and still be saved, but it means that conformity to law is not itself a ground of salvation. Moreover, this does not mean saving faith will fail to produce obedience to God’s law. A failure to obey or to manifest good works signifies a fundamental lack of faith. Erdman rightly commented here: “As Paul elsewhere shows, faith will result in obedience, and justification will issue in holy living, but the truth that justification is by faith alone is the very heart of Christianity.”² F. F. Bruce observed in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* that genuine faith always produces works:

Yet, while men are justified in this sense by faith alone, “the faith which justifies is not alone”; it is, as Paul says in Galatians v. 6, “faith which worketh by love”—and just how it so works is set out in practical detail in chapters xii-xv of this Epistle. But this belongs to a later stage of the argument; at present the important thing to emphasize is that it is by faith, not by what he does, that a man receives the justifying grace of God.³

(2) Justification by faith is for all mankind.

Verse 29. Since God is God both of the Jews and the Gentiles, the way of salvation cannot belong exclusively to the Jews but must be available to all mankind.

Verse 30. The true character of God thus demonstrates that justification by faith must be for all mankind. The verse alludes to the fundamental creed of Judaism: God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is only one God, so there can be only one plan of salvation. Making the law a means of salvation would contradict this truth, for God gave the law only to the Jews. Therefore, salvation must come by faith, and salvation by faith must be the same for both Jews and Gentiles.

(3) Justification by faith establishes the law.

Verse 31. Justification by faith does not nullify the law, but upholds and fulfills it. Here Romans answers the objection that its doctrine makes the law unnecessary. Paul emphatically replied in typical fashion that, to the contrary, justification by faith shows the true purpose of the law and depends upon the law for its validity. Man only needs to be justified if law has first condemned him. Christ's death is necessary only if law has first required the death penalty. By teaching the necessity of Christ's sacrifice and the necessity of justification by faith in Christ, Romans endorses the validity of the law. Romans rejects the law as a means of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard for conduct.

Regardless of which aspect of the law or which definition of "law" that we consider, justification by faith establishes the law. If "law" means the Old Testament, the Old Testament teaches justification by faith (Romans 4). If "law" means the ceremonial law, Christ fulfilled all its demands literally, and we fulfill its types spiritually through faith in Christ (Colossians 2:13-17). If "law" means the moral law, we fulfill it by walking after the Spirit, who gives us power to fulfill all the righteousness

taught by the law (Romans 8:4).

Note: Definition of saving faith

Since many people have interpreted the doctrine of justification by faith to mean “easy believism,” it is important at this juncture to explain clearly what saving faith is in the New Testament. Therefore, we will briefly establish several key concepts relative to saving faith. (For further discussion of this subject see Chapter 2 of *The New Birth* by David K. Bernard.)

(1) *The Book of Romans is written to the church.* It was written to baptized, Spirit-filled believers to explain the basis of their salvation, not to unbelievers to convert them. There was no need to tell the Roman Christians how to be born again, but they needed to know the doctrinal significance of their experience. They had already been born again through faith. To continue in salvation they needed to continue to walk by faith and not to revert to Jewish legalism.

(2) *Faith means more than mental assent or intellectual acceptance; it includes trust, reliance, commitment, and obedience.* Regarding the Greek verb “to believe” (*pisteuo*), Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states: “Used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e. a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ.”⁴ Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says the main elements of “faith” (the Greek noun *pistis*) in its relation to God are: “(1) a firm conviction . . . (2) a personal surrender . . . [and] (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender . . . All this stands in

contrast to belief in its purely natural exercise, which consists of an opinion held in good faith without necessary reference to its proof.”⁵ (See also our comments on Romans 1:17 and 2:6-10, as well as our note on circumcision after 2:25-29.)

Saving faith, then, includes appropriation or application as well as acceptance. We cannot separate it from obedience (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 2:6-10; 10:16; 16:26; Hebrews 11:7-8). Obedience to the Word of God is absolutely necessary to salvation (Matthew 7:21-27; John 14:15, 23; Romans 15:18; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 5:9; I Peter 4:17; I John 2:3-5; 5:1-3). Faith is alive only through response, commitment, and action (James 2:14-26). It is possible to have an initial degree of faith in Christ and still not be saved if there is not complete acceptance, commitment, and obedience (Matthew 7:21-23; John 2:23-25; 12:42; Acts 8:6-23; 10:1-6 with 11:14; James 2:19).

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, to believe is to obey and to obey is to believe. Bonhoeffer wrote against the heresy of “cheap grace,” in which “intellectual assent . . . is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins” and which “amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin.”⁶ As he pointed out, Christ did not ask for just a mental decision or a verbal commitment but for active obedience when He commanded His disciples, “Follow me!” Bonhoeffer stressed the necessity of obedience:

The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus. . . . For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and

faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience. . . . The step of obedience must be taken before faith can be possible. Unless he obeys, a man cannot believe. . . . No one wants to know about your faith or unbelief, your orders are to perform the act of obedience on the spot. Then you will find yourself in the situation where faith becomes possible and where faith exists in the true sense of the word.⁷

Daniel Fuller of Fuller Theological Seminary has likewise stressed that throughout history salvation has always come by grace through faith, which includes the “obedience of faith”:

A “work of faith” or the “obedience of faith” presupposes an inseparable connection between faith and resulting works. Since the connection is inseparable, and genuine faith cannot but produce works, the Bible sometimes speaks of faith and sometimes of works when it speaks of the condition to be met in receiving the forgiveness of sins. . . . We avoid legalism to the extent that we acknowledge how truly sick we are and look away from ourselves and, with complete confidence in the Doctor’s expertise and desire to heal us, follow his instructions (the obedience of faith!) in order to get well. . . . The obedience of faith is *sola fide* (“by faith alone”), for obedience is impelled wholly by faith and is not something added on to faith as though it were coordinate with it.⁸

Justification by faith does not mean mental acceptance instead of obedience, nor does it mean believing instead of doing. Rather it means pleading the merits of Christ instead of our own merits. It means believing Christ, which means believing His Word, which means accepting and obeying His Word in our lives. Faith, in-

cluding the obedience of faith, does not earn or merit salvation, but it is a condition of salvation. God does not save without it. Thus Noah was justified by obedient faith: "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he . . . became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

(3) *Saving faith is a continuous relationship, not just a point in time* (Romans 1:16-17; 11:22; I Corinthians 15:1-2; I Timothy 4:16). It is not just an intellectual condition that exists at one point in time, but it is a continuous attitude and a way of life. Ultimately, salvation is still in the future (Acts 15:11; Romans 8:24; 13:11; Hebrews 9:28). To inherit eternal life, we must live continually by faith, which means walking in obedience. If we persist in unrepented sin, we are not living by faith.

(4) *Through faith we repent from sin, obey the command to be baptized, receive remission of sins at baptism, receive the Holy Spirit, and live a holy life* (Mark 1:15; 16:16; John 7:38-39; Acts 8:12-17; 11:15-17; 19:1-6; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:13). We are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 6:11). The obedient receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:32). We carry out the process of believing on Jesus when we obey Acts 2:38.

Obedying Acts 2:38 is not salvation by works. Repentance, water baptism, and the Holy Spirit baptism are not works of man that earn salvation, but works of God that accomplish salvation in us. God is the One who performs the saving work involved. We either allow God to work in us (by faith/obedience) or we refuse to let Him work (by unbelief/disobedience). He is the One who calls us, leads us to Him, changes our mind and direction (in

repentance), washes away our sins (in water baptism), fills us with His Spirit, empowers us for holy living, and keeps us in His grace. Our attempts to repent, receive remission of sins at water baptism, and receive the Holy Spirit would be of no avail if it were not for God's grace. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ purchased these benefits for us. Our faith in Christ applies them to our lives. Justification by faith does not eliminate the new birth, but explains how we receive the new birth.

If a person believes on Jesus, he will obey Christ's command to repent and be baptized and God will remit his sins. If he does not have faith, he will not repent and be baptized, or if he is baptized it will have no validity. If a person believes on Jesus according to the Scriptures, he will commit himself totally to Christ and God will fill him with the Holy Spirit. If he does not have faith he will not receive the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, faith is the means by which man appropriates God's grace. It is the means by which we yield to God, obey His Word, and allow Him to perform His saving work in us. *Saving faith* is: (1) acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the sole means of our salvation and (2) obedience to that gospel (application or appropriation of that gospel). *The gospel of Jesus Christ* is the good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for our salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). *Our response to the gospel* is to repent from sin, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receive the Holy Spirit as the Apostolic Church did (Acts 2:1-4, 37-39).

Faith in Christ finds expression in obedience to Acts 2:38, thus enabling the sinner to be born of water and of the Spirit, without which he cannot be saved (John

3:3-5). Faith then keeps the born-again person in a continuing relationship with Christ, which includes continuing obedience and holiness of life through the power of God's indwelling Spirit.

B. Proof from Scripture (4:1-25)

Romans 4 uses the example of Abraham, supported by a quotation from the writings of David, to prove that God has always justified people by faith and not by works or by law. From Abraham's story, two other important principles are extracted: (1) Justification by faith is God's plan for all mankind; (2) We can only receive the blessings of Abraham by faith, not by works. The chapter examines the kind of faith Abraham had and applies the lessons learned to the readers. If and only if we have the same steadfast faith in God that Abraham had, then we will be justified as Abraham was. After the discussion of Abraham's faith, we insert a note summarizing the complete doctrine of justification as taught in Scripture.

1. Abraham and David (4:1-8)

(1) What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (4) Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. (5) But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, (6) just as David also described the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: (7) "Blessed

are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; (8) blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

The scriptural proof of justification by faith begins with the example of Abraham. Abraham's experience is not used as a foreshadowing or a prediction, but as an actual case of justification by faith. God's covenant with Abraham preceded His giving of the law to Moses, so by using this example Paul demonstrated that justification by faith was God's method of salvation even before the law.

No better example than Abraham could have been chosen, because the Jews held him in the highest esteem as the father of their race. God's covenant with Abraham formed the basis of their status as God's chosen people. The mark of circumcision, which set them apart from the Gentiles, was the covenant sign God had given to Abraham. Moreover, God called Abraham His friend (Isaiah 41:8). If he could not be saved on the basis of works, who could be?

Verse 1. The phrase "according to the flesh" can have two possible interpretations. If it modifies "Abraham our father," then this passage has particular application to Jewish believers. If it modifies "has found," it relates to Abraham's life and actions, reminding us that his human nature was just like ours. In any case, Abraham is the father of all who walk by faith (verses 11-12).

Verse 2. If Abraham were counted righteous on the basis of his works, he could have boasted in himself and not in God. Actually, Abraham was not saved by his works and had nothing to boast about in the sight of God.

Verse 3. Instead, according to Scripture he believed

God and God reckoned it to him for righteousness. The quotation is from Genesis 15:6. The New Testament quotes this verse again in Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23.

The same Greek verb *logizomai* appears in verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, and 24. It originally referred to numerical calculation, but this passage uses it metaphorically, meaning to account, count for, reckon, credit, impute, or pass to one's account.

Verse 3 does not mean faith itself is meritorious. Faith itself is not righteousness, nor does it become righteousness. The value of faith depends totally upon the object of faith—in this case, God. Faith derives its efficacy not from the one trusting but from the one trusted. Faith is the condition, not the ground, of salvation. It is the method or channel, not the basis, of receiving salvation. Salvation depends on God.

Verse 4. When someone works, his employer does not credit his wages to him as a gift but pays him in fulfillment of an obligation. If God credited Abraham's faith as righteousness, then Abraham did not earn righteousness by works.

Verse 5. When a man does not attempt to base salvation on works, but instead believes on God, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. He receives righteousness from God as a free gift (grace) not as the payment of a debt.

In particular, God counts the ungodly as righteous. This sounds shocking, especially to the Jewish mind, but it is the essence of justification by faith. God counts as righteous those who do not deserve it, those who cannot and do not earn it. Of course, he counts them righteous by their faith, which means they are no longer rejecting

Him but are turning to him in repentance.

Verse 6. To support this startling statement, verse 6 appeals to the words of David in Psalm 32:1-2. David is an example of someone under the law. By using both Abraham and David as examples, chapter 4 establishes that God's plan of salvation was justification by faith both before and during the law. It is hardly surprising, then, for it still to be His plan today.

David spoke of the blessedness of receiving righteousness apart from works. This imputation or crediting of righteousness actually reinstates the sinner to a right position before God.

Verse 7. The sinner receives forgiveness of sin; God provides a covering or an atonement for his sins.

Verse 8. God does not count his sin against him. There is both the imputation of righteousness and the nonimputation of sin. When we read all of Psalm 32, we find no passage indicating that David received forgiveness on the basis of works. The only grounds of acquittal to be found in the Psalm are David's confession of sin and his appeal to the mercy of God.

The quotations from Genesis and Psalms demonstrate that the Old Testament does teach justification by faith. The New Testament shows us more clearly how God is able to offer justification by faith, namely, on the basis of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

2. Justification by faith is for all (4:9-12)

(9) Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

(10) How then was it accounted? While he was circum-

cised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, (12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Verse 9 anticipates a Jewish attempt to limit the blessing of justification by faith to the Jew. To refute this, it returns to the primary example of justification by faith—Abraham, in Genesis 15:6.

Verse 10. Abraham was justified by faith long before he was circumcised. Abraham was justified by faith before the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 15:1-6). Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old (Genesis 16:16). God gave the seal of circumcision to Abraham when he was 99 (Genesis 17:1, 10). Thus Abraham was justified by faith at least 13 years before his circumcision. In Jewish terms, he was an uncircumcised Gentile when he was justified by faith.

Verse 11. His circumcision was a sign and a seal of the righteousness he had before circumcision. It did not convey righteousness but attested to his righteousness. In this way, Abraham is the father of all who believe, even of those believers who are not circumcised. God's plan is to extend salvation to all mankind on the principle of faith. Gentiles, therefore, can be justified by faith and receive imputed righteousness. Salvation comes to uncircumcised believers.

Verse 12. Rather than being the father of the circumcised, Abraham is actually the father of the believer. Since this is true, he is the father of the circumcised only if they also walk by faith as he did. In other words, circumcision alone does not make one a child of Abraham. To be considered Abraham's child one must also walk in the faith Abraham had while he was still uncircumcised. Abraham's true heirs are only those who have faith in God.

This is an amazing reversal of Jewish exclusivism. The section begins with the revolutionary idea (for Jews) that uncircumcised Gentiles can also be saved if they believe. It ends with the shocking conclusion that the Jews will *not* be saved unless they have faith like the uncircumcised (Gentile) believers, of whom their esteemed ancestor Abraham was one. Far from Jews having a corner on salvation, they could easily miss salvation altogether while Gentiles obtain it.

We should note that this section does not attack God's command to the Old Testament Jew to be circumcised or his need to obey. It does show that circumcision in and of itself could not confer salvation. Abraham was saved before circumcision. His failure to be circumcised at that time was not a sign of unbelief and disobedience because God had not yet given the command. Once God gave the command, a failure to be circumcised did indicate unbelief and disobedience, which is incompatible with justification by faith. For this reason, God cut off the uncircumcised Jewish male as one who had broken God's covenant (Genesis 17:10-14). (See the note after Romans 2:17-29.)

We can draw an analogy to water baptism, as does Colossians 2:11-12. Water baptism itself cannot confer

salvation. Those who base their salvation on water baptism—or any other ordinance or ceremony—but do not have the faith it represents will not be justified. Saints in the Old Testament were saved without water baptism because God had not given them the command. In the New Testament church, however, God has commanded water baptism and promises to wash away sin at baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16). A refusal to obey this command signifies unbelief and disobedience, which is incompatible with justification by faith. It is a refusal to enter the new covenant with God. As one begins to believe the gospel, he will repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and have his sins remitted.

3. God's promise comes by faith not law (4:13-17a)

(13) For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, (15) because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. (16) Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (17a) (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") . . .

Verse 13. This section emphasizes that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants comes through faith, not law. The ideas in this passage closely parallel those in

Galatians 3:1-29. The promise alluded to is the inheritance of the world. While no one Old Testament verse expresses the promise in precisely these terms, the idea is expressed in such passages as Genesis 12:2-3 and 22:17-18. God promised to multiply Abraham's descendants, give them victory over their enemies, and bless all nations through Abraham's seed.

Verse 14. This promise came by faith not by law. The law was not even in existence, so when God gave the promise, He obviously did not base the promise upon the law. God granted the promise independently of the law. He did not ask Abraham to follow the law, but to accept the promise by faith. As Galatians 3:17-18 points out, "The law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise."

The only way to receive a promise is to accept it by faith. A promise is not a debt; therefore one cannot use law to earn and enforce a gratuitous promise. Promise and law are two mutually exclusive methods of receiving something. If the promise is conditioned on a non-existent law, then the whole basis of the promise is null and void. If the promise belongs only to those who have the law, then it is not truly a promise. Faith becomes irrelevant and the promise valueless.

Verse 15. Since all men are sinners, the only thing law can do is bring wrath. The law defines sin. Where there is no law there can be no violation of law. Since man can never live up to the law, law always brings condemnation.

Verse 16. Therefore, to obtain the promise we cannot earn it by law. Instead, we must recognize that the promise is a free gift of God (grace) for us to receive by faith. “It is of faith” means “the promise comes by faith.”

God gave the promise to all of Abraham’s offspring. If the promise were by law, not all of Abraham’s offspring could have the promise, but only those who had the law. Therefore, the promise must be by grace through faith so that it may be guaranteed to all of Abraham’s descendants. The promise of inheritance, then, comes to all who have Abraham’s faith, not just to those who have the law. Abraham is the father of us all.

Verse 17a. To prove this point this verse quotes Genesis 17:5. God promised to make Abraham the father of many nations. If the promise came only by law, he would be the father of only one nation, the nation to whom God gave the law. Since he is the father of many nations, he must be the father of all those who have faith, not just those who have the law.

Christ came to bestow the blessings of Abraham upon the Gentiles, particularly the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14). All who belong to Christ are Abraham’s descendants and heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:29). To qualify for this inheritance one must have the faith of Abraham, which Romans 4 examines next.

4. Abraham’s faith examined and applied (4:17b-25)

(17b) . . . in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; (18) who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of

many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." (19) And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. (20) He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (22) And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." (23) Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, (24) but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, (25) who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

This section explains the faith of Abraham, the primary example of justification by faith. To be the heir of Abraham a person must have the faith of Abraham, so it is important to know what kind of faith Abraham had.

Verse 17b. Originally the Bible was written without chapter and verse divisions or punctuation marks. Translators have added these to facilitate reading, comprehension, and reference. While helpful, these additions are not inspired. For present purposes it is beneficial to divide verse 17 since it contains a transition of thought. The *New International Version* divides verse 17 into two sentences, the second of which begins this section: "He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were."

Reverting back to the thought of verse 16, which a parenthetical phrase interrupted, verse 17 reiterates that

in God's sight Abraham is the father of us all. Verses 17-21 describe the faith Abraham had.

(1) *Faith in the omnipotent, omniscient God.* The analysis Of Abraham's faith begins by describing the object of his faith. As we noted earlier, faith is not efficacious in itself. Its power depends totally upon the one in whom we have faith. We must place emphasis on the object of faith rather than upon the act of believing or the quality of having faith. Worshipers of false gods may have as much faith as we do or even more faith than we do, but their faith is vain.

God must be the object of faith—the one, true God who is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing). Abraham believed in the omnipotent God—the God who can make the dead come alive. Although this is a typical Jewish description of God, in relation to Abraham it had particular significance because of his and Sarah's reproductive deadness (verse 19).

Abraham also believed in the omniscient God—the God who knows the future, who can speak of non-existent things as if they existed. Because He is omnipotent, when He does so He gives them real existence. When God said, "Let there be light," light sprang into existence where no light had existed before. Since God knows the future with certainty He can act on future events as though they had already occurred. Again, this had particular relevance to Abraham, because God called him the father of a multitude of nations, changing his name from Abram (high father) to Abraham (father of a multitude), before Isaac was even born (Genesis 17:4-5).

(2) *Faith against all odds.*

Verse 18. Although his situation was statistically

hopeless from a human or natural standpoint, yet Abraham in hope believed.

(3) *Faith in the Word of God.* Specifically, Abraham believed in the promise God had spoken to him. He simply took God at His word. Consequently he became the father of many nations, just as God had promised. The quotation of God's promise is from Genesis 15:5.

(4) *Faith in spite of special adverse circumstances.*

Verse 19. Abraham and Sarah were very old and physically unable to conceive. From a reproductive standpoint, Abraham's body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb was also dead. Not only were the probabilities against them, but they had specific information that rendered their situation impossible. Abraham did not let these special circumstances destroy his faith, however. Almost all scholars who study the textual evidence conclude that the second "not" in verse 19 crept in accidentally during the transmission process. If so, the verse means Abraham was not ignorant of the adverse circumstances but considered them. After consideration, he still believed God's Word outweighed them. If the traditional rendering is correct, the verse means Abraham refused to consider the circumstances (above the promise of God). Either way the point is the same: Abraham did not let special adverse circumstances destroy his faith.

(5) *Faith that did not waver.*

Verse 20. If our faith wavers and turns into doubt, we cannot receive from God (James 1:6-8). Abraham did not stagger at God's promise through unbelief, but actually got stronger in faith and continually gave glory to God.

(6) *Faith that was fully convinced.*

Verse 21. Abraham was fully persuaded that God could do what He promised.

Verse 22 quotes Genesis 15:6 again, pointing out that God counted Abraham righteous because he had the kind of faith verses 17-21 describe.

Clearly, Abraham's faith was more than "easy believism" or mental assent. It was a strong, steadfast faith in God that caused him to trust and obey God's Word under all circumstances. Clearly, Abraham's faith was more than a one-time confession that guaranteed unconditional eternal security thereafter. It was a constant, continual faith that caused him to wait patiently without wavering until God's promise came to pass.

When we study the Old Testament text from which Paul drew his teaching on the faith of Abraham, we find it impossible to separate Abraham's faith from his obedience. "By faith Abraham obeyed" (Hebrews 11:8). The Bible does not record that God justified Abraham on the basis of a mental attitude without an obedient response to God's Word. To the contrary, the Bible records Abraham's justification by faith after he fully obeyed God's command to leave his country and his kindred (Genesis 12:1) and fully believed God's promise to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:2). The passage that describes his justification by faith (Genesis 15:6) comes after he left Ur (Genesis 12), entered Canaan permanently, separated from Lot (Genesis 13), overcame fears of being childless and believed God's promise that he would have a child (Genesis 15:1-4).

God fulfilled His promises to Abraham because Abraham obeyed Him: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My

voice" (Genesis 22:18). To Isaac God said, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:4-5). If the preceding passages mean God blessed Abraham on the basis of works, then the use of Abraham to demonstrate justification by faith is incorrect. Moreover, this would invalidate the argument in Romans 4:13-17 that we can only receive God's promises on the basis of faith not law. The only way to reconcile the Genesis account with the use of it in Romans is to recognize that faith and obedience are inseparable. To have faith is to obey and to obey is to have faith. By honoring Abraham's obedience God simply honored his faith; He did not pay off a debt that Abraham earned by good works. The example of Abraham as used in Romans demonstrates that justifying faith is an obedient, persevering faith.

Verse 23. Romans 4:23-25 applies Abraham's faith to us. The Bible did not record Abraham's justification by faith for his sake only.

Verse 24. It is for our sakes also. Abraham's experience teaches that we too can receive righteousness by faith. If we believe on the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead we too can receive imputed righteousness. Here we see a close parallel with Abraham's faith. We must believe in the same one, true God that Abraham did. We must believe that this God can bring life from death just as Abraham believed. In particular, belief in Christ's resurrection is essential to salvation (Romans 10:9). Those who deny miracles, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, do not have Abraham's kind of faith and will not be justified. We must also believe that our God knows the

future with certainty just as Abraham believed; otherwise we have no assurance of eternal victory over Satan, sin, and death.

Verse 25 describes the foundation of justification by faith. The Spirit of God handed over the man Christ to be sacrificed because of our sins. Our sins made Christ's death necessary; in order to forgive us of our sins He had to die. The Spirit of God raised Christ because of our justification. (The Greek preposition *dia*, translated "because of," is the same in both clauses of verse 25.) In order to justify us Christ had to be resurrected. The resurrection did not happen because we were already justified or to demonstrate our justification. The resurrection actually makes justification possible; it is essential to our justification. Christ's death and resurrection are inseparably united; we must view them as a single whole that makes justification available to us. Without His resurrection we have no justification.

Note: A complete look at justification

At this point, it is helpful to summarize the epistle's teaching on justification and compare it with references to justification elsewhere in the New Testament.

The *source* of justification is God's grace. God is the One who justifies us (Romans 8:33). He provides justification as a free, unmerited gift (Romans 3:24).

The *ground* of justification is the blood of Christ. Christ's blood purchased our justification and enabled God to provide justification in a way consistent with His principles of justice (Romans 3:24-25). The blood of Christ refers to the sacrificial death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ was necessary to make the death

effective (Romans 4:25). In every age justification (and all the work of salvation) has been by grace through faith based on the blood of Christ (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-6; Hebrews 9:22-28; 10:1-22).

The *means* of justification is faith. We receive justification in our lives and apply it on an individual basis through faith in Jesus (Romans 3:22; 5:1). Faith in Christ includes obedience to His gospel.

The *time* of justification in this age is at the time of the new birth (the birth of water and Spirit in John 3:3-5). Justification occurs when we respond to the gospel through the obedience of faith. In the New Testament church age, which began on the Day of Pentecost, God justifies us through faith when we repent from sin, receive water baptism in the name of Jesus, and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-38; I Corinthians 6:11).

The *evidence or fruit* of justification is words and works. Jesus said we will be justified or condemned in the day of judgment by our words (Matthew 12:36-37). The Book of James says we are justified by works (James 2:24). These teachings do not contradict Romans, but speak of being justified in the sense of “shown to be righteous.” If we have faith, we will produce good words and good works as evidence of our living faith. If we do not have faith, our words and works will be evil, and they will condemn us. (See the comments on Romans 2:6-10 for further discussion of judgment according to deeds.)

Some suppose the teachings of Romans and James on this subject to be contradictory. Since the Holy Spirit inspired both books they are infallible and true, with no contradictions between them. They harmonize with and complement each other, presenting a unified theology.

James 2:14-26 teaches that we cannot separate faith from works in actuality. We cannot separate faith from commitment, response, and action. Romans 3:21-25 teaches that acceptable works can only come from faith; James 2:14-26 teaches that works will always come from acceptable faith. Romans says we are justified by faith; James says the kind of faith that justifies will necessarily produce works.

The Book of James recognizes that every good and perfect gift, which certainly includes salvation, is from God and is not earned by works of men (James 1:17). The Pauline epistles recognize that saving grace and saving faith will always produce good works and godliness of life (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-12; 3:1, 8). In describing the heroes of faith, Hebrews 11 could only describe their faith by citing their works of faith, for only by works can one demonstrate faith.

Here are some relevant extracts from the teaching of James: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? . . . Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. . . . But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by

faith only. . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:14, 17-18, 20-24, 26).

James speaks of a professed faith that fails to affect conduct. Such “faith” is dead and is actually no faith at all. For example, Abraham’s faith was shown to be genuine when he obeyed God’s command to offer Isaac on the altar. Of course, he had been justified by faith years before, but that justification by faith was proven to be real by his continued life of obedience thereafter. The scriptural record of his justification by faith was fulfilled—brought to pass, accomplished, ratified⁹—by his obedience. If Abraham had refused to obey God, his “faith” would have been shown deficient. It would not have been the kind of saving faith both Romans and James present.

Both Romans and James use Abraham to illustrate their teaching—both quoting Genesis 15:6—so the fundamental concept of faith is the same in both books. Both books recognize that obedient faith is the only genuine faith. Romans stresses that Abraham’s salvation—and ours—came by living faith, not dead works of the law. James stresses that in Abraham’s life—and ours—the only genuine faith was a faith issuing forth in good works.

In other words, Romans and James make two different points but are based on the same theology. The chart below shows how they use the same terms in different ways and in different contexts:

Different Use of Terms in Romans and James

Term	Romans 3-4	James 2
Faith	Living faith; total reliance and commitment	Dead faith; mental assent or profession alone
Works	Dead works; deeds performed to earn salvation	Living works; fruit of living faith
Justified	Declared righteous by God	Shown to be righteous before God and man

To summarize, *we are declared righteous only through faith*—obedient, works-producing faith—not through conformity to law or deeds done to earn salvation (Romans 3:21-4:25). *We are shown to be righteous only through works* that genuine faith inevitably produces, not by mental faith or a profession of faith standing alone (James 2:14-26). For those who think saving faith is merely mental acceptance or verbal profession, James would indeed contradict Romans and God’s Word would be flawed. For those who realize saving faith includes obedience, Romans and James fit together in a unified, complementary whole.

C. Permanent Blessings of Justification (5:1-11)

(1) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ., (2) through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

(5) Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (6) For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. (8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (10) For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (11) And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Chapter 5 concludes the discussion of justification and prepares the reader for the subject of sanctification, discussed in chapters 6-8. After explaining and proving the doctrine of justification by faith in chapters 3-4, Romans examines the blessings that accompany justification (5:1-11). Chapter 5 emphasizes that justification by faith brings lasting results. It is a complete solution for man's condition. In particular, faith produces three blessings: peace, joy, and hope.

Verse 1. The first blessing of justification by faith is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace here is not tranquillity of mind (although that is included) but a relationship with God. Before justification we were enemies of God and were subject to divine wrath. Through the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ, however, we now have a relationship of peace with God. The Greek

verb here expresses present continuous action: "We are having peace with God." Another ancient reading is "Let us have peace with God," but on textual and logical grounds most scholars accept the traditional reading.

Verse 2. Through Christ's work and through our faith in Him we also receive access to God's grace. The Greek literally says, "We have had access," referring to the time we first entered God's grace at the new birth. We now continue to stand in that grace. As a result, we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. This is the hope of future glory to be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

The same Greek verb *kauchaomai* appears in verses 2, 3, and 11, and it means "to exult or to boast." For stylistic reasons the *KJV* translated it variously in this passage as "to rejoice, to glory, and to joy." Chapter 5 actually lists three things in which we can boast, exult or rejoice: (1) in the hope of God's glory, (2) in tribulation, and (3) in God Himself.

Verse 3. The second object of our joy is tribulation or affliction. Not only can we exult in the hope of future glory, we can exult in present tribulation. The Early Church rejoiced in persecution (Acts 5:41) and in trials (James 1:2). To them tribulation was a sign that accompanied entrance into God's kingdom (Acts 14:22) and endurance in tribulation was evidence of their ultimate reward (II Thessalonians 1:4-5). In other words, sufferings do not destroy our hope but rather confirm our hope.

How is this so? How can we rejoice in present affliction? This is explained in a logical sequence of four steps: (1) Tribulation produces perseverance (endurance). James 1:3 likewise says, "The testing of your faith produces patience."

Verse 4. (2) Perseverance produces character. The Greek word here means proof; approval; a sense of approvedness; a tried, mature character. (3) A tried character produces hope—hope of future reward and future glory.

Verse 5. (4) The hope produced in this manner will never be disappointed because it rests upon God's love. With this last step, it is shown that present tribulation will lead certainly to future glory. Thus, we can rejoice in our present tribulation, seeing it as a confirmation of future glory. Not only can we rejoice in spite of tribulation, but we can rejoice because of present tribulation, for it sets in motion a process that, if we let it, will inevitably lead to future glory.

The love of God, upon which this whole process rests, is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God freely given to us. In this way the present work of the Spirit in our lives is a pledge of our future inheritance (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:13-14).

Verse 6 next proves that these blessings of justification are lasting and that we can have confidence in our future salvation. The passage shows that God's love is the foundation of these blessings. By analyzing the kind of love God has for us, it shows why we can have total confidence in the permanence of our salvation.

What kind of love does God have for us? This love motivated Christ to die on our behalf while we were weak and unable to help ourselves. Christ's death came at God's appointed time or just at the right time for us. Christ died for us while we were ungodly. (This explains how God can justify the ungodly as stated in Romans 4:5.)

Verse 7. In human experience very rarely will some-

one die for a righteous man. If someone does die for a good man, it is a very daring act, stretching the limits of human nature. By implication, it is unthinkable for someone to die deliberately on behalf of an evil man.

Verse 8. Yet that is exactly what Christ did for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died on our behalf. This act commends, confirms, manifests, shows, proves, and establishes God's love for us. The Greek word order places emphasis on the possessive pronoun. God demonstrates His *own* love, toward us.

This only makes sense if we understand the oneness of the Godhead. How does Christ's death show God's love, emphatically God's own love, if Christ and God be two separate persons? Did God love the world so much that He sent someone else to suffer for the world? No. God loved the world so much that He manifested Himself in flesh as the Son of God and sacrificed that human life for us. God loved us so much that He gave of Himself. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). Our Father and Creator became our Savior and Redeemer (Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16; Malachi 2:10; Colossians 1:14-22).

Verse 9 underscores the permanence of the blessings of justification by the use of "much more," which appears also in verses 10, 15, 17, and 20. If Christ died for us while we were ungodly sinners, how much more will He do for us now that we belong to Him? If he counted us righteous when we were unrighteous, He will certainly save us now that we are His.

The verse describes our justification as a past occurrence, referring to our new birth experience. This came by (literally, "in") the blood of Jesus. As our comments on

Romans 3:25 have suggested, the blood of Jesus represents His life given up in death. According to Romans 4:25, His death alone would be ineffective without His resurrection. Therefore, the saving blood of Christ means His death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation. We are not justified by a mystical daubing of Christ's physical blood, but by our identification with His death, burial, and resurrection through the obedience of faith.

While justification is a past event for us, salvation in the complete sense is still future. Through Christ we shall be saved from God's future wrath upon sinners at the judgment. To be saved literally means to be kept or preserved.

Verse 10. This verse recapitulates the thought of verses 6-9. While we were God's enemies God reconciled us to Him by the death of His Son. To be reconciled means restored to favor, restored to a relationship. This is another way of looking at Christ's death. From God's viewpoint Christ's death is a propitiation; from man's viewpoint it is a reconciliation. God is propitiated; man is reconciled.

If Christ's death served to reconcile us, how much more will His life now preserve us? By comparing verses 6-9 with verse 10, we see the following parallel expressions: ungodly/sinners and enemies, justification and reconciliation, Christ's blood and Christ's death.

The key point is this: God has already done the hard part in our salvation, so we can be assured that He will do everything else necessary to maintain our salvation until the end. Humanly speaking, the hard part was the death of the man Christ, especially when that death was for people who did not deserve it or even appreciate it.

Theologically, the hard part was counting the unrighteous as righteous and restoring enemies to fellowship. The easy part is keeping us in fellowship now that we are His friends. The easy part is giving us power to stay saved now that we are, and want to remain, righteous.

God takes the active part in reconciliation. We are passive recipients. God reconciles us to Him; we are reconciled to Him. We cannot bring about reconciliation by our good works; it only comes by the death of Christ. God provides it; we receive it. Of course, we must accept His death and apply it to our lives by obedient faith.

Again, we see the oneness of God in Christ. How could God reconcile us by the death of Christ if God and Christ be separate persons? Since God (the sum total of the Deity) was incarnate in Christ, God was indeed reconciling us to Himself when the man Christ died (II Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:9-10).

We are saved by His life, literally “in His life.” What keeps and preserves us in our relationship with God is the life of Christ in us, the power of His resurrection life in us. The Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us and imparts sanctifying power to us (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:3-4, 11).

Salvation is not just a one-time past experience; it is also present and future. The believer is saved by present and future participation in Christ’s life. If the believer cuts himself off from Christ’s life, he loses his present salvation and his hope of future salvation. If he remains in Christ’s life, he has assurance of future salvation.

In short, we are reconciled by Christ’s death, but saved by His life. It is not enough to look back at Christ’s death *for* us; we must also have His resurrection life *in*

us. Justification and reconciliation both occur when we identify with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection at the time of our new birth. Salvation, however, is more than a one-time event; it is a life-long process consisting of progressive sanctification until ultimate glorification. Justification and reconciliation are grounded in Christ's blood or death, but sanctification is grounded in His life (His Spirit living in us). Not only does Christ justify and reconcile us, He also saves (preserves) us. As long as we stay in Christ and Christ lives in us, we have assurance of eternal salvation. We can have confidence that the blessings of justification are permanent.

Verse 11. Not only do we have confidence in our salvation, rejoicing in the hope of future glory and in the midst of present tribulations, we can also rejoice in God Himself. We rejoice in God through Jesus Christ because Christ is our only access to God. God's grace, the demonstration of His love, justification, and reconciliation come to us only through His manifestation in the flesh as Jesus.

We rejoice in God through Christ because from God through Christ we receive "the reconciliation." The *KJV* says we receive "the atonement," which is the only time it uses that word in the New Testament. The Greek word *katallage*, used in verb form in verse 10 and in noun form in verse 11, does not bear the same meaning as the modern English word *atonement*, however. The English verb *atone* in the Old Testament is the translation of a Hebrew word meaning "to cover, expiate, forgive, pardon." The Greek word in verse 11 means "reconciliation or restoration to favor," and this meaning fits the context. This was the original connotation of the English word "at-one-ment."

D. Universal Application (5:12-21)

(12) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(13) (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. (16) And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. (17) For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) (18) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. (19) For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (20) Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, (21) so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is a difficult passage, particularly verses 12-14, because of the concise phrasing. The passage contrasts

Adam and Christ as the two representative heads of the human race. It demonstrates that the justification principle applies to all mankind. All mankind needs justification and all mankind can receive justification. All humanity is under sin because of one man—Adam—and all humanity can obtain righteousness by one man—Christ. The passage also forms a bridge to the discussion of sanctification, which begins in chapter 6.

Verse 12. All mankind is under sin and in need of justification. Chapter 3 teaches that all men have sinned, but chapter 5 teaches that all men are born under the dominion of sin and with a sinful nature. This passage does not speak of *sins* (sinful acts) but of *sin* (sinful nature). Sinful acts condemn us, but they are only symptoms of our root problem, which is a sinful nature.

Sin entered the world of humanity through one man—Adam. This refers to the historical event of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Although Eve yielded to temptation first, Adam was the head of the family, the representative of the race, and his act had legal consequences for his descendants. The Hebrew word *adam* actually means "man or mankind," including both the male and the female (Genesis 5:2). Eve was deceived, but Adam was not (I Timothy 2:14). He sinned by a deliberate, conscious violation of God's commandment.

Death entered the world of humanity as a direct result of sin, for God's law demanded death for sin. God told Adam and Eve that if they violated His commandment they would surely die (Genesis 2:17). In the context of Genesis, this refers primarily to physical death, although physical death is a symbol of spiritual death (separation from God). This explains why even born-again persons

will die physically (unless Christ returns first). All people were born into a sinful race and are subject to the original death sentence.

The sentence of death passed to all men “because all sinned.” This apparently means that everyone is subject to death because in some sense everyone sinned in Adam. This is not just saying that everyone deserves death because everyone has committed his own sins, although that is certainly true, as explained in Romans 3:23 and 6:23. If we reduce the statement to the latter meaning, then chapter 5 does not advance the argument beyond chapter 3. Moreover, Adam’s sin would not be the reason why sin and death rule over all mankind, as verse 12 states. We would have no explanation for the death of infants and Christians or for man’s universal struggle with the sinful nature.

As Watchman Nee said, “The teaching of Romans is not that we are sinners because we commit sins, but that we sin because we are sinners. We are sinners by constitution.”¹⁰ Romans 5:19 restates this truth: “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.”

In what way, then, did we sin in Adam? This statement seems to violate our concept of individual responsibility and accountability. It does not seem fair for us to be condemned because of our ancestor’s sin. Perhaps several observations will help us here.

First, it is undeniably true that children’s lives are affected by the decisions and actions of parents and other ancestors. The two influences on a person are heredity (determined completely by ancestry) and environment (determined largely by parents in the crucial first years). Nee explained this family solidarity:

Do you see the oneness of human life? Our life comes from Adam. If your great-grandfather had died at the age of three, where would you be? You would have died in him! Your experience is bound up with his. And in just the same way, the experience of every one of us is bound up with that of Adam.¹¹

Second, the Bible teaches the principle of family solidarity. In Joshua 7, a whole family suffered the death penalty because of the sin of Achan, their father and husband. In Hebrews 7:9-10 Abraham's tithe-paying is imputed to his unborn descendant Levi.

Third, the condemnation because of Adam's sin does not mean eternal damnation apart from personal sins. This passage teaches that man has no basis of salvation in himself, but this does not mean that God will judge an individual for Adam's sinful act. Adam's sin does condemn us to be born with a sinful nature and to undergo physical death, but his act does not condemn us to eternal damnation. Our own deliberate sins will do that. Guilt is not imputed, but personal (verse 13). Achan's children died because of his sin, but God did not necessarily condemn them to eternal damnation. Children of alcoholics and criminals suffer many things because of their parents' sin, but they are not thereby damned. The physical, temporal consequences of one generation's sin may be felt by subsequent generations (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9), but God punishes no one spiritually because of his father's sins (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:2-4). The righteous son of a wicked father is not guilty of his father's sins (Ezekiel 18:14-17).

Fourth, if it seems unfair that we suffer because of one man's sin, the unfairness is not in God. God is not

responsible for man's sin or for man's failure to transmit the knowledge of God to future generations. With Adam and again with Noah, God established mankind in righteousness and with full knowledge of Him. Man is responsible for man's sin, and God is fair to condemn all mankind. Nevertheless, God has graciously provided salvation through Christ. If it seems unfair for us to suffer because of one man, then God has more than compensated for that "unfairness" by offering salvation through one man—Christ. We do not deserve salvation; we receive it by grace. As one man led us into sin unfairly, so one man leads us into righteousness undeservedly (Romans 5:18-19).

In summary, Romans 5:12 and 5:19 teach that we became sinners because of Adam. This is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin or imputed sin. We can view this in one of two ways.

First, some teach that we inherit a sinful nature and guilt from Adam. Under this view, we are actually guilty of Adam's sin; God imputes Adam's sin and Adam's guilt to us. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox teach this, as well as many Protestants, including those who believe in predestination. The problem here is that God would condemn us apart from our personal acts, which seems to violate basic principles of justice revealed by conscience and Scripture. In particular, infants would be guilty before God. Consequently Catholics and Orthodox practice infant baptism in an attempt to remit original sin. In their view, the unbaptized infant who dies cannot go to heaven, although Catholics seek to mitigate the horror of this doctrine by inventing limbo, a special place for unbaptized babies. Protestants who hold this view usually do not

insist on the essentiality of infant baptism but teach that God saves at least some infants through their parents' faith or through "faith" He gives them.

The second view is that we inherit a sinful nature from Adam, but not guilt apart from personal acts. As the preceding discussion has indicated, this view seems more compatible with a biblical understanding of divine justice. We should note that the sinful nature is more than a tendency or predisposition that humans can overcome in their own power. Rather, it is an active desire and compulsion to sin that only the Holy Spirit can overcome.

The doctrine of the sinful nature corresponds to the universal experience of mankind. Everyone struggles with evil desires, actions, and habits too strong to subdue without divine intervention. We see evidence of the in-born sinful nature in the infant's selfish, stubborn, undisciplined temperament. No child is born with the fruit of the Spirit, and parents must actively teach children Christian virtues. On the other hand, no child needs to be taught to covet, steal, lie, deceive, and so on. They resort to such things automatically when it is advantageous or convenient to do so.

Many scriptural passages teach not only that all men have sinned, but also that all unregenerate men are under the bondage of sin and that all men have a sinful nature with which to contend (Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9; 7:14; Galatians 3:22; 5:16-17; Ephesians 2:3; I John 1:8).

Of course, once a person has reached the age when God holds him accountable for individual sins, there is no practical difference between the two views described above. The sinful nature will always produce sinful acts

that bring condemnation.

Erdman has summarized these two alternative views of the statement, “all sinned,” in verse 12.

This last statement is commonly interpreted to mean that the guilt of Adam has been imputed to his descendants. It more probably refers to the actual guilt which men incur because of that tendency to evil which they inherit, which is believed to be a result of the disobedience of Adam. It is probably to be interpreted as a simple statement of the universal prevalence of sin, and of death which is its penalty, in order that Paul may compare with it the wide influence of the saving work of Christ.¹²

Verse 13 interrupts the argument to explain that sin and death reigned in the world even before the law of Moses. Of course, God does not impute sin in the absence of law. Since sin is transgression of the law (I John 3:4), God does not hold anyone accountable for sin where there is no law to define and outlaw sin. There is no personal guilt apart from personal violations of law.

The last part of verse 13 does not say “the law,” meaning the law of Moses, but it simply says “law,” meaning the principle of law. God does not reckon sin without a law code, but this does not mean He did not reckon any sin before the law of Moses. Even before Moses, God gave man certain laws to obey. At the minimum, God held everyone accountable to the law of conscience (Romans 2:12-15). Moreover, all have sinned, even if only against conscience (Romans 3:23).

Verse 14. Before the law of Moses death reigned over humanity. The people from Adam to Moses died. This itself demonstrates that sin was in the world during that

time. Although not everyone sinned in the same way Adam did, they still died.

This does not imply that some men lived sinless lives. Adam sinned by breaking a specific commandment God had given. Before Moses not everyone had specific commandments from God, so everyone did not sin as Adam did. Everyone did sin in some way, however, such as by violating the law of conscience. Moreover, the verse implies that some did sin like Adam did. Some did have specific commandments from God and disobeyed them.

Adam is a type or pattern of the one to come, namely, Christ. Adam was the first head or representative of the human race, but he failed to fulfill God's intention for humanity. In order to implement God's plan for humanity, Christ came as the second Adam or second head of the race (I Corinthians 15:45-49). As a man, He is the first-born of the spiritual family of God—the first to conquer sin and death (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18). He is the one we should follow. Everything we lost in Adam we more than gain in Christ (Romans 5:15). The true representative and prototype of humanity is Christ, and Adam's role is only an imperfect type of Christ's role.

This brings us to the vivid contrast between Adam and Christ in verses 15-21: Whatever we lost in Adam, we have more than gained in Christ. We came under sin and death by one man, Adam, but we can obtain righteousness and life by one man, Christ.

Verse 15. (The *KJV* phrasing of verses 15-16 is awkward, but other translations clarify the meaning.) The free gift is not like the offense. Despite the similar roles of Adam and Christ, the contrast between their actions (and the consequences of those actions) is great. Adam

brought death to all mankind, but Christ brings the free gift of God's grace to all (the offer of salvation unto eternal life). This grace abounds or overflows to everyone.

In Greek the word translated "many" has the definite article, so it literally means "the many," or all mankind. The same is true in verse 19.

Verses 15, 17, and 20 use the term "much more," indicating that our benefits in Christ are much greater in scope than our loss in Adam. The same term appears in verses 9 and 10. Consequently, the whole chapter emphasizes the superabundant blessings of God's grace. God's grace transcends sin; it is much more powerful than sin. There are some specific ways in which this is true: Adam sinned once, but Christ's one act of obedience covers many sins (verse 16). Adam's sin causes us to die temporarily, but Christ's obedient act enables us to live eternally (verses 17 and 21).

Verse 16. The contrast continues. Adam's one sin brought judgment resulting in condemnation, but the free gift of salvation covers many sins and results in justification. Verses 16-18 use the language of a court of law to describe mankind's situation.

Verse 17. Adam's one trespass brought death to the whole world, but through Christ we shall reign in life. The Greek present participle here literally means we "are receiving" the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. Although Christ died for the whole world and the benefits of His act are available to all, only those who are presently receiving His gift of righteousness will actually inherit eternal life.

This excludes the doctrine of universalism (the doctrine that everyone will be saved), which some teach from

this passage: Many people will not be saved (Matthew 7:13-14; Revelation 20:14-15). This passage only teaches that every person can receive justification by faith, not that every person will in fact do so. Christ has made salvation available to all, but not everyone will accept God's grace by faith and apply it to his life.

Verse 18. We must refer back to verse 16 to find the two subjects of the two halves of verse 18. By Adam's trespass *judgment* came to all men, but by Christ's one righteous act *the free gift* of salvation came to all men. Adam brought condemnation, but Christ brings justification unto life. The one righteous deed that brings justification is Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which is a unified, inseparable whole (Romans 4:25; 6:4). The benefit of this act is not merely the negative work of taking away sin and punishment, but also the positive work of imputing righteousness and granting life. (See II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:20.)

Verse 19. Through Adam's disobedience the many (all mankind) were constituted as sinners. (See the commentary on verse 12 for a discussion of how we became sinners in Adam.) Through Christ's obedience the many (all mankind that believe) will be constituted as righteous. Christ's obedience was specifically His death on the cross, but His death actually culminated a whole lifetime of obedience (Philippians 2:5-8). Christ lived His entire life in our stead; He was our sinbearer, substitute, and propitiation throughout His life.

The representative principle applies both ways. Even though we all became sinners because of Adam, we can all become righteous through Christ. The wording implies not only justification (as in the preceding verses) but also

sanctification. Not only does God count us righteous, but He will actually make or constitute us righteous, enabling us to overcome the inherited sinful nature. Verse 19 thus prepares us for a shift in the discussion from justification (chapters 3-5) to sanctification (chapters 6-8).

Verse 20. This verse, along with verses 12-13, explains how the law of Moses fits into the picture. Verse 12 says sin “entered or came into” (*eiserchomai*) the world, while verse 20 literally says the law “entered or came alongside” (*paretserchomai*). Sin came first, then the law of Moses joined sin.

The law had a temporary purpose: to cause the recognition of sin to abound or increase. That is, God gave the law to identify sin, reveal it clearly, and convict man of it. He gave the law to make wrongdoing a legal offense. Sin was already there, but without the law man was not fully aware of his disobedient attitude and could not be judged fully for all his conduct that was contrary to God’s original intention for the human race. By defining sin more, the law increased sin. Moreover, because of man’s perverse nature, the law actually stimulated more sin in man. The more sin was defined, the more sinful man revealed his rebellion.

Even though God gave the law for good and necessary purposes, it had the effect of increasing sin. Nevertheless, God’s grace always works faster than sin. As sin increases, grace overflows. The more sin condemns, the more grace forgives. The more sinful the age or the environment, the more God gives grace to overcome sin. Thus no one can use a sinful surrounding to excuse failure to live for God. (See II Corinthians 9:8; 12:9; James 4:6.)

Verse 21. One last comparison summarizes the contrast between Adam and Christ. As sin reigned in death,

even so grace can reign in righteousness to bring eternal life. As we once lived in sin, resulting in death, if we accept God's grace and live in His righteousness we will receive eternal life. This way of salvation comes through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Footnotes

¹*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1192.

²Erdman, p. 60.

³F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 6 of *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, R. V. G. Tasker (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 109.

⁴Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1885; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 511.

⁵W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1940), p. 411.

⁶Bonhoeffer, pp. 45, 47.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 61, 69, 72-74.

⁸Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 113, 118-19. Emphasis in original.

⁹Thayer, p. 518.

¹⁰Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1957), p. 35.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹²Erdman, p. 73.

IV.

The Believer's Life

(6:1-8:39)

The life of holiness that results from
receiving God's righteousness

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The Believer's Life (6:1-8:39)

Having explained how one becomes a Christian, Romans next describes how the Christian should and must live. Romans 3-5 teaches justification by faith; Romans 6-8 teaches sanctification by faith. If someone has truly been justified, he will be sanctified.

Sanctification means separation, particularly separation from sin. The Greek word is *hagiasmos*, which Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich define as holiness, consecration, or sanctification. The *KJV* sometimes translates the word as "holiness" (Romans 6:19, 22) and sometimes as "sanctification" (I Corinthians 1:30; II Thessalonians 2:13). Theologically speaking, sanctification means (1) the state of separation from sin and dedication to God and (2) the process of becoming progressively more holy. Justification means to be declared righteous; sanctification means to become actually righteous in daily life. Sanctification begins at justification/regeneration, but continues as a progressive work of the Spirit throughout our lives (I Corinthians 6:11; I Thessalonians 3:13; II Thessalonians 2:13; 5:23).

Sanctification, then, means living a life of victory over sin. It includes deliverance from the power of sin and union with the living Christ. The same grace that removes the guilt of past sins is available to help us overcome sin

in the present and future. The gospel of Christ provides not only a remedy for sinful acts, but also a remedy for the sinful nature.

Griffith Thomas explained the relationship between justification and sanctification (holiness):

Justification is the strait gate through which we enter the narrow way of holiness, and from this point we are to deal with the way, not the gate. Hitherto the contrast has been between wrath and justification; now it is to be between sin and holiness.¹

Charles Erdman described how a proper understanding of justification by faith will necessarily lead to sanctification:

The common fallacy . . . in most criticisms of the doctrine of justification by faith consists in the failure to understand what is meant by faith. If faith denotes mere assent to dogmas, or the repetition of a creed, then to accept one as righteous, in view of his faith, would be absurd and unjust; but faith describes a personal relationship to Christ. For a believer, it means trust in Christ, obedience to Christ, love for Christ; and such trust and obedience and love inevitably result in purity and holiness and a life of unselfish service. Justification by faith cannot encourage sin, or allow sin, or discredit the law of God. It must result rather in righteousness and true obedience. Justification, therefore, issues in sanctification. The two may be separated in thought, but they are united in experience.²

Even before the explicit teachings of Romans 6-8, the doctrine of sanctification is implied in 3:8, 3:31, 5:10, and 5:19. Chapter 6 teaches that Christians must not con-

tinue to live in sin. Chapter 7 explains that we cannot succeed in this endeavor by relying either on the law or the flesh. Chapter 8 proclaims that we can fulfill this responsibility by walking after the Spirit. Just as we were justified by faith in Christ, so we must continue to walk by faith in Him and allow His abiding Spirit to empower us daily for holy living.

A. Dead to Sin, Alive to God (6:1-14)

(1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (3) Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, (6) knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. (7) For he who has died has been freed from sin. (8) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. (10) For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (11) Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (13) And do not present

your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Chapter 6 asks, "Should Christians sin?" It divides the inquiry into two questions: (1) Shall we sin in order to obtain grace? (verse 1). That is, does grace encourage sin? (2) Shall we sin because we are under grace? That is, does grace allow sin? (verse 15). The answer to both questions is a resounding "No!" Verses 1-14 analyze the first question.

Verse 1. Chapter 5 concludes the discussion of justification by faith. Chapter 6 asks what the logical consequences of that doctrine are for the Christian's life. Some might suppose that justification by faith encourages sin. After all, according to Romans 5:20, the more sin there is, the more grace God bestows to save us from sin. Does this imply that we should sin more in order to obtain more grace? Should Christians continue to sin in order to display God's grace more vividly and to experience His forgiveness in a greater measure?

Verse 2. Absolutely not! Anyone who thinks this has a basic misunderstanding of the Christian life. He does not realize that the Christian has died to sin. The Greek verb tense here is aorist, indicating that the death occurred at a specific time in the past. Since the Christian has died to sin, it would be contradictory for him to continue to live in sin.

To be dead to sin does not mean we are incapable of sinning (verses 12-13), but it means we have turned away

from sin at conversion (verse 4). It means we have been set free from sin's dominion (verses 7, 14, 18).

Verse 3. The remainder of this section offers a three-step approach to leading an overcoming life: (1) *Know* (verses 3-10); (2) *Reckon* (verses 11-12); (3) *Present (KJV—Yield)* (verses 13-14).

First, we must *know* what has already happened to us when we were converted or justified. There is a note of surprise and dismay in Paul's question to those who continued to sin: "Don't you know what happened to you?"

Specifically, we have identified with Jesus Christ's death. When we were baptized into Christ, we applied His death and burial to our lives. Death to sin indicates repentance, for by definition repentance is a turn from sin to God. Repentance means death to the old lifestyle, death to the gratification of sinful lusts. Our water baptism signified that we died with Christ. Water baptism is of no value until repentance has taken place (Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:7-8; Acts 2:38), so our baptism announced our death to sin. At baptism we identified personally with Christ as His body lay in a dead state.

We should note the importance placed on water baptism. F. F. Bruce commented here:

From this and other references to baptism in Paul's writings, it is certain that he did not regard baptism as an "optional extra" in the Christian life, and that he would not have contemplated the phenomenon of an "unbaptized believer". . . . Faith in Christ and baptism were, indeed, not so much two distinct experiences as parts of one whole; faith in Christ was an essential element in baptism.³

Water baptism is a personal identification with Christ; it places us into Christ. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Of course, both water and Spirit are necessary components of the new birth, so actually one baptism comprised of both water and Spirit places us into the body of Christ (John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 4:5; I Corinthians 12:13).

Verse 4. Baptism, then, is an identification with Christ’s dead state, specifically an identification with His burial. Colossians 2:12 echoes this verse, saying we were “buried with Him in baptism.” Just as the man Christ died and was buried while dead, so we die to sin at repentance and are baptized while repentant.

The primary purpose here is not to teach on the proper baptismal mode, but the reference to baptism only makes sense if baptism is by immersion. Comparing water baptism to burial is incomprehensible unless we assume immersion. A person is not buried by sprinkling a few drops of dirt on the body; the body is totally submerged under the earth. *The Pulpit Commentary* notes here:

The reference rather is to the form of baptism, viz. by immersion, which was understood to signify burial, and therefore death. . . . As our burial (or total immersion) in the baptismal water was followed by entire emergence, so our death with Christ to sin, which that immersion symbolized, is to be followed by our resurrection with him to a new life.⁴

Likewise, Paul’s inspired teaching here only makes sense if baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a personal identification and a burial with Christ, not with three separate persons of a trinity. Only Jesus Christ

died and was buried on our behalf.

Both Paul and the Roman church must have known only baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, Paul would not have thought of baptism as a *burial* with *Christ* or expected his readers to see it as such. We should practice baptism in this manner also, because it was clearly the practice of the Early Church and because only by so doing can we preserve the biblical significance and symbolism of baptism.

If we have identified with Christ's death and burial, we will also identify with His resurrection. Just as God raised the man Christ from death, so we should rise from repentance and water baptism to walk in newness of life. The verse is not speaking merely of future bodily resurrection after physical death, but of new life now.

We receive this newness of life through the indwelling of Christ's Holy Spirit. "Having died to what we were held by . . . we should serve in the newness of the Spirit" (Romans 7:6). "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). "And if Christ is in you . . . the Spirit is life" (Romans 8:10). The negative aspect of conversion is death to sin, which is symbolized and completed by burial with Christ in water baptism. The positive aspect of conversion is new life in Christ, which we receive by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 5 continues the resurrection analogy. If we identify with Christ's death, we will certainly identify with His resurrection and live a transformed life. The word translated as "planted together" in the *KJV* means "united, grown together."

Verse 6. When we think about our conversion, then, we should realize that our old man was crucified with

Christ. In this context, the “old man” is the old sin-dominated personality, unregenerated man, old sinful lifestyle, or dominion of sin. It is not the sinful nature itself, which is still with us (Galatians 5:16-17; I John 1:8). We still have the capacity to sin. We still have a sinful nature with its desire to sin. We are no longer under the control of the sinful nature, however, because the Spirit gives us overcoming power. The sinful nature itself did not die, but the dominion of the sinful nature did (verses 7, 9, 14). We used to be slaves of sin, but now we have power over sin (verses 6, 18).

Verse 7. Since we died to sin, we are free from sin. (See John 8:34-36; I Peter 2:24.) Duress or torture can force someone to do many things, but once he dies his tormentors have no further power over him. Similarly, once we die to sin, sin has no more power to dominate or condemn us. The Greek word translated as “freed” in this verse literally means “justified.” The chapter describes more than freedom from condemnation, however, for verses 14 and 18 use a different Greek word to describe an actual freedom from the compulsion to sin and from the sinful lifestyle.

Verse 8. We died with Christ on the cross. At Calvary, Christ purchased our salvation and destroyed the power of sin over us, but these benefits are not conferred upon all mankind automatically. A person must still apply Christ’s death to his life, and this occurs when he repents. Just as Christ died and rose again to new life, we should die to sin and then live a new life free from sin. If we share in His death, we can share in His life also.

Verse 9. Now that Christ has arisen from the dead He will never die again. Death no longer has any power over

Him. To continue the application, once we are converted and rise in newness of life, we should never go back into the old sinful lifestyle. Sin no longer has any power to force us to do its bidding.

Verse 10. Christ died once, as a sacrifice for sin. From then on, the man Christ lives forever unto God. So also we should die unto sin once and from that time forward live for God.

In summary, when we repented, were baptized in the name of Jesus, and received the Holy Spirit, we applied the gospel—Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection—to our lives. We need to know and realize what this means. We now have power to live a new life of victory over sin. We do not have to yield to temptation; we can and should overcome it by the power of the Spirit.

Verse 11. The second step in overcoming sin is to *reckon* ourselves as dead to sin. The Greek verb is *logizomai*, the same word used so frequently in chapter 4. It is an accounting term, and it means to reckon, calculate, count, or take into account. Here it means to evaluate or consider as a result of calculation. Based on our knowledge of what has already happened to us, we should reckon ourselves as dead to sin. Once we realize that we died to sin and therefore sin has no power over us, we must act upon our knowledge and disown sin’s rule. We must consider ourselves to be, and act as if we were, truly dead to sin and alive to God. We must reckon on this fact; we must count it to be true. (The critical text omits “our Lord.”)

As Jerry Bridges wrote in *The Pursuit of Holiness*, we must acknowledge our responsibility for holiness. God has already given us Spirit-filled believers all the power

we need; it is our responsibility to act upon what we know and have received. Instead of merely continuing to pray for victory over sin, we should begin to walk in obedience. If we sin it is because we have chosen to disobey. If we live a defeated life it is because we have allowed ourselves to fall back under the influence of sin.

A dead man is insensible to all forms of persuasion and temptation. In like manner, we must be insensible to the enticements of sin. We died in Christ and have been declared righteous; now we must act accordingly. We must learn to be in practice what we already are by faith in Christ.

Verse 12. In short, we must not let sin rule over us. We must not obey sinful lusts. This admonition shows that we face the real danger of sin reasserting control over us. At the same time, this verse also gives assurance that we can overcome sin. Sin could rule our lives, but now that we are born again we do not have to let it. (The critical text omits the words “it in.”)

Verse 13. The third step in overcoming sin is to *present* (or *yield*) ourselves—not to sin, but to God. We should not offer the parts of our body to sin, but to God. We should not employ our bodily members as instruments of sin but as instruments of righteousness. Romans 12:1 uses the same Greek word in admonishing us to “present” our bodies to God.

How does a child of God present or yield the body to sin? It usually begins by being insensitive to the Spirit, by participating in questionable situations, or by refusing to listen to conscience, God’s Word, God’s Spirit, and godly leaders. We present our bodies to God by walking in obedience and following the leading of the Spirit, including

such basics as prayer, Bible study, church attendance, worship, and following godly leaders. Just as we once presented our bodies to sin, so now we should present ourselves to God (verse 19).

Verse 14. God does not intend for sin to rule the born-again person. If we will know, reckon, and present, then sin will not have dominion over us. This is particularly true because we are not under law but under grace, and grace gives more than law does. As Chapter 7 shows, law does not give power over sin, but in the age of the fulness of grace we have that power through the Spirit.

B. Free from Sin, Slave of Righteousness (6:15-23)

(15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! (16) Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? (17) But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. (18) And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (19) I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. (20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21) What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness,

and the end, everlasting life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 15 begins the analysis of the second question of chapter 6: Shall we sin because we are under grace? Does grace allow sin? This is a very common temptation today. Under the law, punishment for sin was usually swift and severe. In the age of grace, however, the emphasis is on the availability of forgiveness. Consequently, many people think, "Let us sin because grace abounds. Let us sin whenever enjoyable or convenient; we can always be forgiven later."

This attitude is incompatible with true Christianity. While God graciously forgives and restores the penitent, He does not overlook unrepented sin. Those who think grace is a license to sin and who do not sincerely repent are not forgiven, but they only deceive themselves.

We are now under grace instead of law, but this does not mean we can ignore sin. In every age salvation has always been by grace through faith. The transition from the age of law to the age of grace did not reflect a change in God's view of sin, but only a further development of God's redemptive plan. Law reveals sin, while grace supplies the remedy for sin. Law commands but does not empower. Grace, on the other hand, gives power to overcome sin and do God's will (Philippians 2:13). Far from allowing sin, grace repudiates sin.

Verse 16. To make this point clear verse 16 uses an analogy to slavery. (The Greek word *doulos* here literally means "slave.") God's grace gives us freedom to choose between two masters—sin or God. To whom we give our

bodies shows who is our master. If we choose to live in sin, then we are sin's slaves, and the end result is death. If we choose to obey God, then we become His slaves, and the result is righteousness.

Verse 17. All of us used to be slaves of sin. The sinful nature dominated us and compelled us to sin. The verb is past tense, stressing that we are no longer slaves of sin. When we obeyed from the heart the doctrine to which we were entrusted, we received deliverance. We can be thankful, for we now have power over sin. The verse emphasizes obedience, doctrine, and conversion of the heart. This eliminates all forms of "easy believism" and shows the biblical meaning of conversion, regeneration, and justification faith.

Verse 18. By obedience to the doctrine, then, we were liberated from the bondage of sin. The old master has no more power over us. This does not mean that we are free *to* sin; it means we are free *from* sin. There is no intermediate state between sin and righteousness; the two are mutually exclusive. By definition, if we sin we are not living in righteousness and if we are righteous we are not living in sin. Thus if we are truly free from sin, then we are slaves of righteousness—that is, we are living in total submission to righteousness.

This slave analogy does not mean God forces us to serve Him, but it corresponds to the love-slave of Exodus 21:1-6. We now have a choice of masters, but once we have chosen God as our master we must obey Him. We cannot live in an independent state in which we serve neither sin nor God. Any attempt to live apart from God's will is a manifestation of pride and self-will, which is sin.

Verse 19 acknowledges that it is using an imperfect

illustration taken from human society, yet it does so because our carnal, finite human minds can understand things easier that way. Our Christian status is not analogous to slavery in every way, for Romans later describes us as the wife of Christ (Romans 7:4-6) and also the adopted children of God (Romans 8:15-17). We are not merely slaves, but we are friends of God (John 15:15). Nevertheless, the slavery analogy does emphasize two key points: (1) We must completely renounce the sinful lifestyle and (2) we must submit ourselves totally to God, obeying Him in all things. Jesus also compared the Christian life to a choice between two masters (Luke 16:13).

We once gave our bodily parts to the commission of sin, leading to greater and greater lawlessness. In like manner, we should now present them to righteous acts, thus leading to holiness or sanctification. (The KJV sometimes translates the Greek word *hagiasmos*, found in verses 19 and 22, as “holiness” and sometimes as “sanctification.”) There is an important key for victorious living here. In the same manner that we used to yield to sin, we can now yield to God. We used to sin by receiving a tempting thought, entertaining it, visualizing the sin, yielding our bodies to it, and eventually developing sinful habits. Now when we receive biblical teachings or spiritual promptings, we should be careful to entertain them, visualize the will of God, yield ourselves to it, and develop godly habits.

Verse 20 states the logical complement of verse 18. When we were slaves of sin, by definition we had no relation to righteousness.

Verse 21. Being “free” from righteousness was not something wonderful, however. The sins we committed in

that state are shameful to us now. (For this reason, we should never sensationalize or boast of a sinful past, but we should only glorify the Savior.) Moreover, those sins did not result in anything good, but only condemned us to death.

Verse 22 restates and elaborates on verse 18. To be free from sin means to be the slave of God. We have the choice between serving sin or serving God, and the one excludes the other. When we serve God the result will be holiness (sanctification) in this world and eternal life in the world to come. If we serve God, He will produce holiness in us, (sanctify us) and prepare us for an eternity with Him.

Verse 23 contrasts sin and God, wages and gift, death and life. If we continue in sin, the final payment we will earn is eternal death. If we put our faith in God, we do not earn anything, but we will enjoy God's grace. We will receive the gift of eternal life, which comes through Jesus Christ, our master.

This is a spiritual law of general application. Although many people apply it primarily to the unconverted, in the context it refers first to the Christian. If the Christian remains in or returns to a sinful lifestyle, he will not enjoy eternal life. Only by living in God's grace and using the overcoming power provided by grace will he inherit eternal life.

In summary, chapter 6 establishes that a Christian should not sin. Although we still battle the desires of the sinful nature, we have power through Christ to subdue those desires. If we sin in a moment of weakness, we can repent and confess it to God, thereby receiving His forgiveness. Sin should be the exception, however, and not

the rule in our lives. We must continually renounce the sinful lifestyle. "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Romans 6, then, refutes the notion that a Christian has to sin on a regular basis. It also contradicts the doctrine of unconditional eternal security, which says a Christian retains his salvation even if he continues to sin after conversion without repenting. Justification results in sanctification, and we cannot separate the two. If there is no evidence of sanctification in our lives, then we are not living in a state of justification either. God's grace not only justifies us but also sanctifies us. The Christian can, should, and must live victoriously over sin, as Erdman aptly stated:

The Christian life . . . is not merely negative. It does not consist simply in freedom from sin. It is a new and risen life, lived by the power of the risen Christ. . . . Our evil passions and dispositions are still active and powerful. We must, however, disown their rule. We must trust in Christ for strength. The life of a Christian need not be one merely of ceaseless conflict; it should be a life of ever more continuous victory.⁵

C. Free from the Law (7:1-13)

(1) Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? (2) For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But

if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. (3) So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. (4) Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another; even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. (5) For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. (6) But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (7) What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." (8) But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. (9) I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. (10) And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. (11) For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. (12) Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. (13) Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

Chapter 6 teaches that Christians should not continue

to sin; chapter 7 shows that this cannot be accomplished by depending on the law or the flesh.

Verse 1. In the Greek, the verse begins with “Or.” Romans 6:14 asserts that Christians are not under law, and Romans 7:1 picks this thought up again to demonstrate its truth. The argument is addressed to those who know law. If this means the law of Moses, then the Roman church apparently contained many converted Jews and Gentile “God-fearers.” In any case, a general principle of law is that the law only controls someone while he lives. It has no power after death.

Verse 2. To illustrate, verses 2-4 use an analogy to marriage. In God’s plan, marriage is to be broken only by death. The marriage vow binds husband and wife together as long as they both live, and divorce is not God’s will (Malachi 2:13-16; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; I Corinthians 7:39).

Verse 3. Thus, if a woman marries another man while her husband is still living, she transgresses God’s law and becomes an adulteress. If she marries another man after her first husband dies, then she is morally pure in God’s sight. The primary purpose is not to teach on marriage but to use a well-known fact about God’s marriage law—marriage is binding until death and no further—to illustrate our freedom from the law.

Verse 4 makes the spiritual application. We are the wife, the law was our first husband, and the risen Christ is our second husband. As long as we were living in the unregenerate state we were bound to the law. By identifying with Christ’s death, however, we died to the law. The law has no more power over us after our death in repentance. At the new birth, then, we are free to marry

the risen Christ, and by doing so we become able to bear spiritual fruit to God.

This interpretation of the analogy says the wife died, while verse 2 envisions the husband dying. Consequently, some say the first husband is “the old man” of Romans 6:6—the unregenerate self, the old lifestyle, the dominion of sin—and the wife is the inner self, the true self. Since knowledge of sin comes by the law and since the law was necessary for the old man and for him only, the death of the old man at conversion also involved the death of the law. The first husband (old man and law) died, so we are free to marry another. The first explanation above seems better because verses 4 and 6 both say *we* died and because this section is establishing a new point—freedom from the law—not merely reiterating the thought of chapter 6 (freedom from sin).

Regardless of the exact application of the analogy, the central point is clear: by the death of Christ and our identification with it, we have died to the law. Since we are dead to sin and the law, we are free from both and are now united with the living Christ.

Verse 5. Before we became united with Christ, we were “in the flesh,” that is, controlled by the flesh or the sinful nature. The law condemned sin, but its prohibitions actually stirred up the sinful desires within us. These lusts worked in our bodies to produce sinful behavior. The final outcome of this sin is death.

Verse 6. Now, however, we are not dependent upon the law. The law did not give power over sin, but in fact aroused sinful desires. By dying to the law, we have been delivered from its government. We can now live under a new government that gives us power to overcome those

sinful desires and to live a holy life. Now we can bring forth fruit unto God.

What does it mean to say we are free from the law? Christ suffered the penalty of the law for us, which is death, and fulfilled the law in our stead. The law cannot condemn us or make any demands upon us if we remain in Christ. We are free from (1) the penalty of the law, (2) the attempt to fulfill the law and please God by human effort alone, (3) the destructive power of the law caused by man's mistaken reliance upon it for justification, and (4) the ceremonial demands of the law. (For further discussion, see the note on legalism and Christian liberty in Part VI of this book and also see chapter 3 of *Practical Holiness: A Second Look* by David K. Bernard.)

Of course, we are still under God's moral law. God's moral nature and moral law are eternal. They are not dependent upon the law of Moses. By teaching us not to sin, chapter 6 exhorts us still to live according to the moral law, for by definition sin is lawlessness (I John 3:4).

Romans 7:6 shows that the alternative to law is not lawlessness or immorality but holiness through Christ. We have been delivered from the law so we can serve God through the Spirit. The *NIV* says, "We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." No longer must we attempt to do God's will by reading a list of external commandments and trying to force the sinful nature to conform. Instead, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit we have received God's law internally, along with supernatural power to fulfill it. We serve Christ not just as a slave but as a devoted wife, out of love. In short, true Christian service comes through the power of the

Spirit and not by commandment of the law.

Verse 7. If the law of Moses did not give power over sin, but actually aroused sinful lusts, is it sinful? Verse 7 anticipates this charge and denies it emphatically. The law came from God, and it is good for the purpose God gave it. Romans rejects the law as a means of salvation, but upholds the law as a teacher (Romans 7:7, 13) and a moral standard for Christians (Romans 3:21; 8:4).

To explain the reason for the law of Moses, verses 7-13 explain its nature and purpose. In this passage, the word *law* in Greek sometimes appears with the definite article (“the”) and sometimes without it. The variation seems to be significant here, with “the law” meaning the law of Moses and “law” meaning law as a principle or law in general. “The law” occurs in verse 7 (first and third uses) and verse 12. “Law” appears in verses 7 (second use), 8, and 9.

The law of Moses reveals the nature, existence, power, and result of sin. It shows man his sinfulness and his need of salvation, and as such it is an important part of God’s redemptive plan for humanity. Without some kind of law, we would not know what sin is, for law defines sin for us. For example, we would not know what covetousness is, or realize that it is sinful, unless there was a law against it. The quote is from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21).

The passage is written in the first person, apparently using an example from Paul’s personal experience. It is also possible that the passage uses the first person to represent mankind as a whole.

Verse 8. The commandment told us what was wrong and warned that the penalty for violators was death. In

theory, the commandment should have motivated us not to sin, but in practice the sinful nature in us used the law as an opportunity to promote evil desires. (The *KJV* word *concupiscence* means lust or evil desires. It comes from the same Greek root word as the *KJV* words *lust* and *covet* in verse 7.) How could this be? First, law reveals hidden sinful desires that we would not otherwise recognize as sinful. Second, when law confronts the sinful nature it can actually provoke more sin—the well-known “forbidden fruit” syndrome. The more something is forbidden, the more we desire it.

Sin is imputed and has power to kill only if there is some type of law that outlaws sinful behavior and establishes the death penalty for sin. In the civil realm, for example, no one can be arrested, convicted, and punished for an act unless some law makes it a crime.

Verse 9. Before any principle of law became effective in our lives, we were alive—that is, we had no consciousness of sin and no condemnation. Paul could have been speaking of his personal experience in childhood, or of the theoretical state of the human race prior to law.

When we learned principles of law, the sinful nature caused us to violate law, and so we came under condemnation. We died spiritually. The Greek word translated as “revived” here can simply mean “spring into life.” When law came, sin sprang into life. From the Fall onward humans have had a sinful nature, but only when law comes does the realization of sin come. Law reveals the existence of the sinful nature lying within us.

Verse 10. Originally, God’s law was designed to teach us how to live spiritually, but since we were sinful by nature we became violaters of law and subject to the

death penalty. Instead of giving us life, then, the law brought death.

Verse 11 personifies sin to portray its role. Sin is like an assassin lying in wait, but without a weapon. When law came, given for our good, sin saw its opportunity and tricked us into disobeying God's law. In this way sin took advantage of the law and used it to kill us. Perhaps the reference is specifically to the Garden of Eden, when Satan deceived Eve (I Timothy 2:14). By lying to her about the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit, Satan persuaded Eve to violate God's first law, thereby bringing sin into the human race for the first time.

Verse 12. The law of Moses is holy, just, and good. It is not evil. It only becomes harmful when we violate it or misuse it.

Verse 13. We cannot blame the law for our spiritual death. Sin, not the law, is actually the direct cause of death. For example, the automobile is a wonderful invention that has brought dramatic benefits to our society and economy. Yet, when someone drives the automobile in a reckless fashion, he can cause great destruction and death. Though these consequences would not have occurred without the automobile, we do not blame the invention but the operator. As another example, when a criminal is imprisoned or executed, the consequences for him and his family are severe. Yet the legislature, the judge, and the jury are not to blame for his predicament; the criminal himself is. The law is good, and it is not responsible for our death. Sin is. Sin uses the law as a weapon, but it is sin that actually causes spiritual death.

How is the law good and why did God give it, if sin could kill us by it? How can the law of Moses be good if

we are so glad to be delivered from it now? The law reveals sin for what it really is, showing it to be exceedingly sinful. Before the law of Moses, men had some knowledge of sin but they did not realize how far from God's plan they were. The law of Moses fully revealed the definition of sin (Romans 3:20; 5:20), the sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:13), and the result of sin, which is death (Romans 4:15).

If we could truly learn these lessons from the law, then we would be totally committed to overcoming sin. We would turn to God in repentance and use the power of the Spirit to conquer sin on a daily basis. For example, if we truly understood how much God loves truth and hates lies and how much lying pollutes us spiritually, we would not see lying as a minor social indiscretion but as the horrible sin it really is. We will truly desire holiness only when we recognize the utter sinfulness of sin.

D. Inability of the Flesh (7:14-25)

(14) For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. (16) If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. (17) But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (19) For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (20) Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (21) I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. (22)

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (25) I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

This section describes someone who is “carnal, sold under sin” (verse 14), who is subject to the law of sin and death (verses 17-24). This description has confused many people and has given rise to many differing interpretations. The key to understanding the passage is to realize that it does not describe the normal Christian life. The Christian is free from the dominion of sin (6:18) and free from the law of sin and death (8:2). Carnality leads to death (8:6), not eternal life. Whatever Romans 7 means, in view of the strong teaching of chapters 6 and 8 it cannot mean the sinful nature still controls Christians or forces them to sin on a regular basis.

Whom does the passage describe? Paul wrote in the first person, so apparently he spoke from personal experience. His experience must have general application or else God would not have inspired him to include it here. The first person narrative portrays the human dilemma vividly and helps the reader identify with it personally.

Since the account does not fit the Christian, many commentators propose that the passage describes an unregenerate person. Since the speaker acknowledges God’s law, it seems to be particularly relevant to the unregenerate Jew. Consequently, some propose that it depicts

Paul's life under the law before conversion.

While this view is plausible, the use of the present tense complicates matters. Possibly the present tense is used for the same reason the first person is used—to make the description more vivid, relevant, and immediate. More likely, the present tense indicates that the passage could apply to a Christian in his present regenerate state as well as in his past unregenerate state. The main point is this: Romans 7:14-25 describes someone who tries to be good and to live holy by his own efforts, whether he is born again or not. In other words, the passage describes the fleshly nature of Paul or any other individual when viewed alone—it describes what even a born-again person is like if he attempts to live for God by human effort alone (verse 25).

Chapter 6 admonishes us to live above sin. Chapter 7 depicts someone who tries to do so by relying on the flesh. This is particularly evident by its repeated use of the words *I* and *my*. Chapter 8 shows us the only way to live a holy life is to walk after the Spirit, as indicated by its frequent use of the word *Spirit*.

Chapters 7-8 discuss four spiritual laws (principles):

(1) *Law of God* (7:22, 25)—God's moral commandments; God's moral law. It is holy, just, and good, but it does not give man power over the law of sin (7:14; 7:16; 8:3).

(2) *Law of the mind* (7:22-23)—the inner self; the conscience. It can accept and desire to follow the law of God, but it does not have power over the law of sin (7:18, 25).

(3) *Law of sin* (7:23)—the sinful nature; the domination of sin; the compulsion to break God's law. It controls man and his actions. It overpowers the law of the mind,

and the law of God alone cannot conquer it (7:20-21).

(4) *Law of the Spirit* (8:2)—the Holy Spirit within the believer; the principle of walking after the Spirit. Only this law gives power over the law of sin and over death (the result of sin) (8:1-4).

Verse 14. God's law pertains to, is caused by, and is filled with the Spirit. The law cannot make man spiritual, however, for he has a sinful nature and cannot fulfill the law. Not only has man sinned, but he is also dominated by sinful lusts (Romans 3:9; 5:12, 19). The law itself is good, but legalism—human efforts to become spiritual by works of law—is vain.

Verses 15-23 show the flesh's futile attempt to be righteous.

Verse 15 begins with a paradox. "For that which I do I allow not" (*KJV*). The Greek word translated "allow" here is *ginosko*, meaning "I know, I understand, or I acknowledge." Hence, while the sentence may mean, "I do not approve of my own actions," more probably it means, "I do not understand my own actions." The baffling puzzle is that even though man desires to do good, he finds himself performing evil, which he hates. He acts contrary to his own inner desires.

Verse 16. By acknowledging that the things he does are evil, man gives assent to God's moral law. The mind (conscience) thus supports the law of God.

Verse 17. The law of the mind and the law of God together still cannot stop man from sinning. The sinful nature dominates man, causing him to violate his own conscience. This does not excuse or justify sin, but simply expresses the human experience.

Verse 18. The flesh (sinful nature) contains nothing

good. While the mind of man can acknowledge good things and while the unregenerate man can have many noble characteristics, ultimately there is nothing in man that can overcome sin. There is nothing in man that merits salvation. Man can desire to do good, but he does not have the power to perform it. (By contrast, the Spirit-filled person does have power to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law—Romans 8:4—because God gives him both the desire and the power to fulfill God’s will—Philippians 2:13.)

Verse 19 restates verse 15. Man wants to do good but ends up doing evil.

Verse 20 reiterates verse 17, explaining that the sinful nature is the cause of this situation. Again, this does not deny man’s responsibility for his own acts of sin, but describes his sinful nature.

Verse 21 sets forth the law of sin: Evil is present even in the life of the man who wants to do good.

Verse 22 delineates the law of the mind: Man in himself, even without God’s Spirit, can joyfully acknowledge the goodness of God’s moral law. (The Jews are a prime example.)

Verse 23. Such a person still cannot actually fulfill God’s law in himself, for, in addition to the law of the mind, another principle is at work in his body. The law of sin wages war against the law of the mind and overpowers it. It captures man and makes him an unwilling prisoner to sin.

Verse 24. The last two verses of chapter 7 summarize the problem. Paul exclaimed, “What a wretched man I am!” and then inquired, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (*NIV*).

Verse 25. As Paul contemplated the agonizing situation just depicted, he broke forth in an inspired thanksgiving, for he had already experienced the answer in his own life: “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (*NIV*). The answer has already come through Christ.

The next sentence recapitulates the problem: man can acknowledge God’s law in his mind, but in the flesh he continues to sin. It is very important not to view this last sentence as the solution, which some do because it follows the expression of thanksgiving. It would be a strange solution indeed, for it would allow the Christian to remain in sin, contrary to the emphatic teaching of chapters 6 and 8.

In recognition of the difficulty, some commentators propose that the two sentences of verse 25 were somehow accidentally switched in the transmission process and should now be reversed. This would make the verse easier to understand, but we need not depend upon such an explanation. We can resolve the confusion as follows. Verse 24 presents the problem. The first sentence of verse 25 is a parenthetical outburst of thanksgiving—and such digressions are typical of Paul’s inspired writing style—as it impatiently anticipates the solution. Then, the second sentence of verse 25 summarizes man’s dilemma before chapter 8 proceeds to provide the answer. Bruce has explained it well:

“I myself” (*autos ego*) is emphatic: it is “I by myself” who experience this defeat and frustration, but “I,” as a Christian, am not left to “myself”: “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has come to dwell within me, and His presence and power make an almighty difference.⁶

In conclusion, Romans 7:14-25 does not describe a normal Christian life. The Christian does not have to sin a little every day. The Christian is not reduced to a frustrated life of desiring to do good but continually being defeated by sin. Holiness does not mean acknowledging good in the mind but continuing to sin in the body.

Romans 7:14-25 does not describe the conflict of the two natures—flesh and Spirit—in the believer. If it did, the flesh would be the victor! Rather, it describes the struggle between the flesh (sinful nature) and the mind of a man who tries to obey the law of God by his own efforts. As such, it applies either to the unregenerate man or to the regenerate man who is not walking after the Spirit. (There *is* a conflict between flesh and Spirit in the believer—described in Romans 8:5-14 and Galatians 5:16-26—but in that conflict the Spirit can always be victorious.)

There are two important lessons in Romans 7: (1) *The inability of the flesh*—Without the grace of God, there is nothing in ourselves that can overcome sin. (2) *The inadequacy of the law*—The law does not give us power over the sinful nature. Just as the law cannot justify us, neither can it sanctify us.

In sum, Christian holiness does not come by external commandments (the law of God) or by the human desire to do good (the law of the mind). Rather, sanctification comes by internal power granted by the Spirit of God (the law of the Spirit).

E. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)

Romans 8 presents God's plan for the normal Christian life—life in the Spirit. Consequently, it is the climax

of this section (chapters 6-8), which is itself the highpoint of Romans. The Christian can overcome sin and live a holy, sanctified life through the power of the Spirit, by walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh. He has the responsibility but also the privilege of sanctification. He endures suffering now but future glory awaits him. If the Christian will continue to let the Holy Spirit lead and control him, then regardless of the circumstances he has the assurance of salvation now and for eternity.

1. Power in the Spirit (8:1-4)

(1) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (3) For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, (4) that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Verse 1. Those who are “in” Christ Jesus—those who believe in Him, live in Him, and have Him abiding in them—are under no condemnation. Their record is clear in God’s sight, and their own conscience is clear. The Christian should not let Satan, other people, or his own conscience condemn him for sins of the past. Of course, if he is still living in sin, he should feel condemnation, and this should motivate him to repent and receive forgiveness.

The rest of chapter 8 deals with holy, Spirit-filled living. Holiness does not earn salvation, however, for at the beginning of the Christian life we are already free of condemnation. Verse 1 thus shows that justification comes before sanctification. Grace gives before it requires.

The last half of verse 1 (“who do not walk . . .”) is absent from the oldest manuscripts and therefore from the critical text. Many scholars suppose it was added during the transmission process under the influence of the same phrase in verse 4.

Verse 2. The law of the Spirit—the spiritual principle of life in Christ Jesus—has delivered us from the law of sin and death. The sinful nature dominated us, causing us to commit sinful acts that bring death, and neither the law of God nor the law of the mind could set us free. Through the indwelling of Christ’s Spirit we now have freedom from the vicious cycle of sin and death.

Verse 3. The law of God as given to Moses could not deliver us from sin and death. It was too weak, because it depended upon weak human flesh for fulfillment. It demanded what the sinful human nature could not provide.

To remedy this deficiency, God sent His own Son—He manifested Himself in flesh—to provide an offering of atonement for sin. He did not come in sinful flesh, but in the “likeness” of sinful flesh. Jesus Christ was fully human in all respects, but He did not have a sinful nature and He did not sin (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15; I John 3:5). He had a complete, yet innocent, human nature like Adam had originally. By His incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus Christ became our sin-offering and destroyed the power of sin over us.

Verse 4 presents the purpose for redemption: to fulfill

the righteousness of the law *in us*. The purpose of justification is sanctification. Jesus Christ came to do what the law could not do—to give us power over sin, to enable us to meet the righteous requirements of the law. God does not save us so we can continue to sin and be excused. God saves us so we can fulfill His original plan for the human race, He wants a holy people—people who can fellowship and commune with Him.

How can we fulfill the law's requirements? We can only do so by walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh (sinful nature). We must live in daily dependence upon God's indwelling Spirit, looking to Him for guidance and power. We cannot rely upon the flesh. Instead of our trying by human effort to live up to the demands of an external law, the indwelling Spirit imparts to us internally the desire and power to live according to God's holy will. This way of the Spirit fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34. There God promised to make a new covenant with His people by putting His law in their minds and writing it in their hearts.

Bruce has explained this new way of life in the Spirit:

Christian holiness is not a matter of painstaking conformity to the individual precepts of an external lawcode; it is rather a question of the Holy Spirit's producing His fruit in the life. . . . The law prescribed a life of holiness, but it was powerless to produce such a life, because of the inadequacy of the human material that it had to work upon. But what the law was powerless to do has been done by God. . . . All that the law required by way of conformity to the will of God is now realized in the lives of those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit and are released from their servitude to the old order. God's commands have now become God's enablings.⁷

God does not give us inherent power over sin so that we can overcome sin on our own. Rather, God Himself becomes the power dwelling in us that overcomes sin. We overcome sin not by our struggles, but by relying on His Spirit. We are still totally dependent upon the daily leadership, control, and power of the Spirit. Sanctification is based on an intimate relationship with the Spirit of God at all times.

In this way Romans 8:1-4 answers the dilemma of Romans 7:24-25. Through the power of the Spirit we have the possibility of holiness.

2. Flesh versus Spirit (8:5-11)

(5) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (7) Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (8) So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (10) And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Verse 5. There are two principles of living, two mind sets, two roads to follow: we can walk after the flesh or after the Spirit. Paul wrote this to Christians. In that con-

text, he was not merely contrasting the unregenerate life with the regenerate life, but he was presenting a choice still open to the regenerated man.

The first option is to live according to the flesh (sinful nature). This means obeying the flesh and letting it take control. Those who make this choice put their priorities on the flesh. They cater primarily to the needs and desires of the physical man, and they seek to gratify sinful lusts. They adopt the value system of the world and vie for worldly success, fame, wealth, material possessions, and power, to the detriment of spiritual growth.

The second option is to live according to the Spirit. This means following the leading of the Spirit and letting the Spirit take control. Those who make this choice put their priorities on the will of God. They are sensitive to the Spirit. They seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. They are faithful in prayer, Bible study, church attendance, and support of the work of God.

How can we tell which option we are choosing? We must evaluate our priorities, use of time, use of money, thoughts, attitudes, dress, actions, and amusements. In all things we must compare our lives to the Word of God.

Verse 6. The word *carnal* means fleshly, so to be carnally minded means to have the mind of the flesh. If we choose the first option—carnality—the result will be death (verse 6) and enmity against God (verse 7). Clearly, the Christian cannot continue to live in unrepented sin and still inherit eternal life. If we choose the second option—spirituality—the result will be life and peace with God.

Verse 7 elaborates on the outcome of carnality. The carnal mind is totally contrary to God. It does not obey

God's law. In fact, as Romans 7:14-25 has shown, the flesh cannot do so.

Verse 8 uses the phrase "in the flesh" as the equivalent of "walking according to the flesh, living according to the flesh, or minding the things of the flesh." Simply put, those who are "in" the flesh cannot please God. Man cannot save or sanctify himself.

Verse 9 contrasts those who are "in" the flesh with those who are "in" the Spirit. Not only is this a contrast between the unregenerate and the regenerate, but, as the context of the whole chapter indicates, it is a contrast between those who are controlled by the flesh and those who are controlled by the Spirit, whether they have ever been born again or not.

If the Spirit "dwells" in us, we are "in" the Spirit and not "in" the flesh. This means more than receiving the Spirit at a point in time; it means having the Spirit's abiding presence in our lives. It means more than talking in tongues, "shouting," or exercising spiritual gifts; it means letting the Spirit control all aspects of our lives. In the context, being "in" the Spirit or having the Spirit "dwelling" in us is equivalent to "walking according to the Spirit, living according to the Spirit, or minding the things of the Spirit."

Verse 9 injects a strong statement on the necessity of having the Spirit. We must have the Holy Spirit in our lives to be Christians. In order to belong to Christ and inherit eternal life with Him, we must first receive the Holy Spirit and then continue to have the Spirit control our lives.

We should note that the "Spirit of God" is the same as the "Spirit of Christ." There is no separation in the Bible

between God, Christ, and the Spirit. Christ is God manifest. The Holy Spirit is God Himself (Acts 5:3-4), so the Holy Spirit is the spiritual nature of the risen Christ (II Corinthians 3:17). In fact, if the Spirit dwells in us, we have Christ in us (Romans 8:10).

Verse 10. Even though we are in the Spirit, the body is dead because of sin. Even for the believer, the physical body is mortal and subject to death because he has been born into a sinful race. Perhaps the verse also means the flesh is spiritually dead or useless. Nevertheless, we can have spiritual life now and for eternity because of our righteous standing in God's sight. As the *KJV* and *NIV* indicate by not capitalizing the *s* in *spirit*, the emphasis seems to be on the life we enjoy in the human spirit (which certainly comes from God's Spirit).

Throughout this passage, context must determine whether the human spirit or God's Spirit is meant, as the Greek text does not distinguish between *spirit* and *Spirit*. Since the Christian's spirit is submitted to and submerged in God's Spirit, often the practical teaching is the same either way.

Verse 11. Spiritual life would be blessing enough, but God also has a plan to save the body. Though we will die physically, one day the Spirit will resurrect and glorify our mortal bodies. The Spirit that dwells in us is the same Spirit that dwelt in Christ and resurrected Him, so He can and will do the same thing for us.

As we see again, the Spirit of God is the same Spirit that dwelt in Christ. There is only one Spirit of God (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4); in fact, God is a Spirit (John 4:24). The Spirit that dwelt in Christ was all the fulness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9). The titles of

Father, Christ, and Spirit do not divide the Godhead into separate personages, but refer to different relationships, functions, or offices of the one God. Whichever title we use, it is the same God who works. We can say the Father resurrected the body of Christ (Acts 2:24; Ephesians 1:17-20), or Jesus did so (John 2:19-21), or the Spirit did so (Romans 8:11).

The result of having the Spirit dwell in us is twofold. (1) We enjoy spiritual life now and forever. (2) One day we will receive physical resurrection and immortality.

3. Responsibilities and Privileges (8:12-17a)

(12) Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” (16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17a) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . .

Verse 12. Comparing the results of carnality with the results of spirituality, it is clear that we are debtors—but not debtors to the flesh. The implication is that we owe the Spirit everything but the flesh nothing. The flesh says, “You owe it to yourself to have a good time,” but actually we do not owe the flesh anything because it has never done or never can do anything good for us. The flesh is still in us, but we are not to live according to it.

Verse 13. If we as born-again persons persist in living according to the flesh, we will die. This is why we owe the flesh nothing. Again, we see an explicit denial of the doctrine of unconditional eternal security (“once saved always saved”).

We are debtors to the Spirit. In view of what God has done and will do for us, we owe it to Him to live according to the Spirit and to kill the deeds of the flesh. The *KJV* word *mortify* means to kill or put to death. The underlying Greek word is in the present tense, indicating we must continually put to death or extirpate the practices of the sinful nature. We can only do this by the power of the Spirit. In doing so and only in doing so, we will live spiritually.

Someone has compared human life to a tree. As sinners, we were like trees bearing sinful fruit. At repentance and water baptism we chopped off the old tree of sin, leaving a tall stump. When we received the Holy Spirit, a shoot was grafted into the old stump, and two natures began to coexist in one tree. To live the Christian life, we must allow the new shoot to grow and bear spiritual fruit. At the same time, we must continually cut off shoots that spring from the old stump. Otherwise those shoots from the stump (the old sinful nature) will branch out and surround the new shoot (the spiritual nature), stunting its growth and eventually causing it to wither and die. Through the Spirit, we must continually deny sinful desires, refusing to nourish the sinful nature or to give it any opportunities to reassert itself.

Verse 14. Only those who are being led (present passive tense) by the Spirit of God are truly the sons of God. Salvation is not based solely on a one-time past experience,

but on lifelong submission to the Spirit. The born-again person who returns to living after the flesh is not “unborn,” but he will be disowned and disinherited. When he was born again he became a child of God, but he is not continuing in that relationship and will not enjoy the eternal benefits of it, unless he repents and is restored to that status.

Verse 15 uses an analogy of adoption. Regeneration, which is not mentioned here, refers to our new nature, but adoption refers to our position and privileges. The two terms are complementary ways of viewing what God does at conversion. The adoption analogy emphasizes that we are not just small children, but adult sons and, therefore, heirs of God.

When we received the Holy Spirit, we did not receive a spirit of bondage and fear. In the old life, we lived in bondage to sin and we could only fear the judgment of God. God has given us His Spirit so that we can have freedom from sin and a loving, father-son relationship with Him. The slave analogy of chapter 6 illustrated an important principle of Christian living, but it is inadequate (Romans 6:19). The adoption analogy is far better. Once we were not spiritual children of God and had no spiritual inheritance. God adopted us, thereby conferring all of His riches and benefits upon us, even though we had no right to them.

The Spirit adopts us into God’s family (Romans 8:15) and is also the first benefit of our adoption (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit enables us to address God as, “Abba, Father.” *Abba* is the Aramaic word for father. It is not the formal word, but the familiar or intimate word that a child would use to address his own father, similar to the English

word *daddy*. Jesus addressed His Father by this term during His agonizing prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). God gives us the Spirit of His Son so that we can call Him our Father, just as the man Christ did (Galatians 4:6).

Verse 16. Not only does the Spirit adopt us, but the Spirit also attests to our sonship. When the born-again person has the Spirit dwelling in him, the Spirit bears witness to his spirit that he is indeed a child of God. Subjective spiritual experience supports the objective witness of Scripture. This may also refer to speaking in tongues, although tongues alone do not prove the abiding presence of the Spirit in the absence of spiritual fruit.

Verse 17a. Since God has adopted us, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with the man Christ. An adopted son has all the privileges of a natural-born son. Everything the only begotten Son has by right, we have by grace. Everything the man Christ won for Himself as a sinless man, we inherit by believing on Him.

In sum, holiness is not only a *possibility* for us (Romans 8:14), it is also our *responsibility* or obligation (Romans 8:12-14). Moreover, it is our *privilege* (Romans 8:15-17).

4. Suffering and Glory (8:17b-30)

(17b) . . . if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; (21) because the creation itself also will

be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (23) And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (24) For we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (26) Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (28) And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Verse 17b. If we are truly joint-heirs with Christ, then we should expect to participate in His suffering as well as His glory. Fellowship with Christ includes both. Many people want to know Christ in “the power of His resurrection,” but few are willing to know Him in “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). We cannot assist Christ in redemption, but we must renounce world-

ly life to gain heavenly life (Luke 9:23-25). We must partake of Christ's sufferings before we can enjoy His glory (I Peter 4:12-13). Death comes before resurrection, Calvary before Pentecost.

The emphasis of the clause is on the glory. Earthly suffering is only a prelude to eternal glory.

Verse 18. Present suffering should not dismay us, for the future glory will be far greater than the suffering. In fact, the glory to come so far outweighs present suffering that it is not even worth mentioning the latter. When Jesus says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and wipes the tears from our eyes, it will be worth it all.

Verse 19. Our future glory is so great that the whole creation eagerly awaits the revelation of our status as sons of God. Verses 19-22 personify creation and attribute to it human emotions of anticipation and longing. (The *KJV* translates the same Greek word as "creature" in verses 19, 20, and 21 and as "creation" in verse 22. The latter is preferable in modern English.)

As far as God is concerned, we are already His sons, but this has not yet been revealed to the world. The world does not yet enjoy the blessings that will come when Christ establishes His kingdom on earth and we reign with Him.

Verse 20. Creation longs for deliverance because it is now subject to "vanity" (*KJV*), "futility" (*NKJV*), or "frustration" (*NIV*). Creation itself is now under the curse of sin. Nature did not willingly choose to be so, but God placed it under a curse because of the sin of His highest creation and image creature, man. God told Adam, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it

shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field” (Genesis 3:17-18). Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12). Apparently stress, disharmony, disease, death, decay, and destruction were unknown in God’s creation until man’s fall. At that time, God subjected nature to the curse, yet He did so in hope.

Verse 21. That hope is the future deliverance of creation from its bondage to decay, which will occur when God’s children come into their full inheritance. One day, nature will no longer be under the curse (Revelation 22:3). God will restore creation to its original beauty, harmony, and peace. Apparently this will involve a change away from competition, predation, and “the survival of the fittest.” On a limited scale now, many plants and animals coexist in a harmonious relationship beneficial to both, a condition known in biology as symbiosis. Bees live off nectar from plants and in turn ensure the plants’ propagation by carrying pollen from flower to flower. Some birds pick insects and parasites off large animals, receiving a meal for their efforts. Man tends dairy herds and receives milk, butter, and cheese in return. Apparently, when Christ establishes His kingdom on earth, he will restore creation to a balanced, symbiotic relationship, with nothing being hurt or destroyed (Isaiah 11:6-10).

Verse 22 graphically depicts the present curse by personifying nature and describing its agony. The whole creation is groaning and laboring in birth pangs until the new age comes into being. Perhaps this describes nature’s imbalance and our planet’s physical convulsions, as evidenced by hurricanes, tornados, volcanos, and earthquakes.

Verse 23. Not only does creation labor under the curse and yearn for deliverance, but so do we who have the

Spirit. We have not yet received final salvation. The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits—the initial ingathering of fruit that has ripened before the main harvest. The Holy Spirit is just the initial installment, the down payment, the guarantee of our ultimate inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14).

We still struggle with the sinful nature, physical weakness, sickness, and mortality. We are still awaiting our full inheritance, the completion of our adoption as sons, which is the redemption of the body. We enjoy spiritual salvation now and we are already God's sons, but we have not yet received all the benefits of salvation. At Christ's coming, the nature of sin will be destroyed and our mortal bodies will become immortal. Our adoption will be acknowledged before all, and we will receive the fulness of our sonship.

Verse 24. We were saved in this hope of future glorification. In times of discouragement, we must remember that hope means waiting for something we do not see yet. If we could see and have it now, there would be no need for hope.

Verse 25. Since we are living by hope in the unseen, we must have patience. Through faith and patience we inherit the promise (Hebrews 6:12). Again, salvation is not just a one-time confession of faith, but a lifetime of patient trust in God.

Verse 26. The hope of future glory should be enough to sustain us in present suffering, but God's grace has even more to offer us. Not only does God promise future deliverance, but He also provides present help by His Spirit. Just as God gives us hope for the future, so He helps us in present trials. The Greek word translated "infirmities" in the *KJV* means human weakness and

limitation, not sickness.

Sometimes we know what we need, and we know how to pray for the situation. Many times, however, we do not know the answer to our problem, and so we do not even know how to pray about the matter. In such cases, the Spirit intercedes on our behalf with inexpressible groans. There is a deep level of intercessory prayer in which the Spirit takes control of our minds and prays through us. This can certainly include speaking in tongues, which I Corinthians 14:15 describes as praying “with the spirit.” It can also mean groans and sighs while in travailing prayer. Not all prayer is on this level, but sometimes we must arrive at this depth of prayer. If we desire to be a supernatural, revival church and to have the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits, then we must have intercessory prayer in the Spirit.

Verse 27. When the Spirit prays through us in this manner, we can have confidence that our prayers are in God’s will. The Spirit of God will certainly make intercession in accordance with the will of God, for the Spirit is God Himself (Acts 5:3-4). Therefore, the God who hears our prayers and knows our thoughts will certainly know the mind of the Spirit.

Verse 27 does not separate the Godhead into two persons, with one person interceding and another person hearing the prayer. If it did, who is the intercessor—the Holy Spirit (verse 26) or Christ (verse 34)? Who is the searcher of hearts—God (verse 27) or the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10)? The Spirit is simply God in activity. The Spirit is no more a separate person from God than a man’s spirit is a separate person from that man. Just as a man’s spirit knows his own thoughts, so God’s Spirit

knows the mind and will of God (I Corinthians 2:11).

Verse 28 proclaims the providence of God. Not only is our future secure, but our present is also. If God has future glory for us and we are now on the path to it, then even the present must be in God's hands. God knows how to work out present circumstances, including suffering, for ultimate good. Some manuscripts say, "All things work together"; others say, "God works all things together."

God is in control of our lives, and He will not let external circumstances thwart His ultimate will for our lives. He will never permit something so terrible that He cannot correct. He will never allow a trial too big for us or a trial with no way of escape (I Corinthians 10:13). Even when Satan causes evil to befall us, God will bring good despite it. God can even use that evil to make good things happen. For example, sinful men caused Joseph to become a slave and ultimately a prisoner in a foreign land, but God used those very circumstances to exalt Joseph and to deliver his family from famine. His brothers acted evilly but God allowed it to bring about good (Genesis 50:20). Similarly, God turned Balaam's intended curse upon Israel into a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5). (See also Proverbs 12:13, 21; Ezra 8:22-23.)

Romans 8:28 does not mean we can always identify positive results from every trial or tragedy. All things work "together" to bring ultimate good. The individual ingredients of a cake may be very distasteful when eaten separately, but when they are mixed in the right proportions and baked in the correct manner the end result is very tasty. Many different colors—both dark and light—blend together to produce a beautiful tapestry or painting.

All of life's experiences taken together mold our character, make us what we are, and bring us to where we are. Sometimes trials motivate us to serve God, develop our character, or keep us in a state of dependence upon God. Without them, only God knows what we would be like. In the end, when we reach heaven and look back on life as a whole we will be able to confess, "All things worked together for good."

This promise is only to those who love God and who are called according to His plan. If we do not love God with total commitment or if we are not living according to His plan, then we must repent and correct our lives before we can claim the promise.

Verse 29 demonstrates God's providence by presenting His eternal plan of salvation for man. This plan has five phases:

(1) *Foreknowledge*. God's plan began with His knowledge of the future. Before He created man, He knew man would fall into sin. Consequently, before the creation of the world He had already planned Calvary (I Peter 1:18-20). He foresaw that some men would accept His offer of salvation and that He would have a church, so He designed a plan of eternal salvation for that church.

(2) *Predestination*. God predestined for His church to be molded into the likeness of His Son. To predestine means to foreordain, to determine in advance, to plan ahead of time with no possibility of alteration. Predestination applies to God's plan, not to the fate of each individual. God predestined the incarnation, the atonement, the church, and the ultimate salvation of everyone in the church. These events were bound to occur regardless of anything else. The individual still has the freedom to

choose whether or not he will be in that church. *Whom* is plural in this verse, indicating the group is predestined, not the individual.

The point is that the believer's salvation is not just a wish or a mere possibility. It is an absolutely certain event if the believer will only remain in God's plan. Moreover, salvation will consist of a transformation into the image of the Son—the image of God in human flesh. We will not become God, but we will receive a sinless nature and an immortal body like that of the man Christ.

God did not intend for the Son to be the only man to conquer sin and death. God came in flesh in order to have many sons. The man Christ is the first in God's spiritual family, but God intends for the Son to have many "younger brothers" who enter the family after Him. Christ is our brother (Hebrews 2:17). He is the firstborn in that He is the head of the church, has the pre-eminence, and was the first to conquer sin and death (Colossians 1:15, 18; Revelation 1:5). We are to follow in His footsteps and become co-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). If we place our faith in Him, we will one day truly become like Him (I John 3:2). When our faults and failures cause discouragement, we must not give up, for if we will only remain in God's plan we have the guarantee of ultimate, total, and permanent victory.

Verse 30.

(3) *Calling.* God first knew He would have a church, then predestined its ultimate salvation. Based on His plan, He then began calling man to submit to His plan. The offer of salvation extends to everyone (John 3:16; II Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17), but only those who respond in faith are chosen. "Many are called, but few

chosen" (Matthew 20:16). Romans 8:30 speaks of an effectual calling. Only those who respond to God's grace are actually called out of sin. They become the called-out ones. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which comes from a verb meaning "called out."

(4) *Justification*. God justifies those He calls out of sin. He counts them as righteous.

(5) *Glorification*. The final step in man's salvation is glorification, which is the culmination of the sanctification process. Ultimately, the righteous will receive glorified, sinless bodies.

Verse 30 speaks of glorification in the past tense, even though the whole section points to it as future. This shows that, in the mind of God, glorification is as good as done. It is absolutely certain. God has already provided it for us; we are simply waiting to receive it publicly. In the world's eyes we are nothing, but in God's eyes we are kings and priests. We are already His sons; we are just waiting the revelation of our status (Romans 8:19). If only we will stay with God's program, we will surely inherit eternal glory with Jesus Christ. The section ends as it begins—with the promise of future glory with the Lord.

5. Assurance of Salvation (8:31-39)

(31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (33) Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

(35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (37) Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (39) nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6-8, which describes the overcoming Christian life, is the most glorious section of Romans. Chapter 8 is the highpoint of that section, and verses 31-39 are the climax of that chapter. In short, these verses are the crescendo of the entire Book of Romans.

This final section of Romans 8 proclaims assurance of salvation. God's provision of salvation will stand regardless of any circumstances and all opposition. This is not the doctrine of unconditional election or the doctrine of unconditional eternal security, but the doctrine of assurance. If we want to be saved we can be. If we choose to remain in Christ and keep our faith in Him, absolutely nothing can take away our salvation.

Verse 31. In view of God's grand plan of salvation for mankind, what can we conclude? First, God is our protector. With God on our side, it does not matter who opposes us. With His help we can overcome any opposition. God and one person always constitute a majority. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6).

Verse 32. God is our provider. God gave His highest gift when He gave His only Son to die for us. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). If God was willing to assume human life and lay down that life for us, surely He will freely give us anything else we need to endure to the end. If He has already paid the ultimate price, we can rest assured He will provide us with sustaining grace the rest of the way. He did not bring us this far to let us down. He will protect His costly investment in us.

Verse 33. God is our justifier. Who can prosecute us when God proclaims us righteous? If God, the Supreme Judge, acquits us, no one can say we are guilty.

Verse 34. No one can condemn us, because we receive forgiveness through the death, resurrection, and present intercession of Christ. His death purchased our justification and His resurrection made the death effective (Romans 4:25). His present intercession refers to the present availability of Christ's sacrifice to cover our sins. Even if we sin after our initial justification, we can receive forgiveness by confession, for Christ presently serves as our advocate (I John 1:9; 2:1). This does not mean Christ is presently praying for us or offering sacrifices on our behalf, for He offered one sacrifice for sins forever and His atoning work is complete (Hebrews 10:10-14). What it does mean is that the application of His atonement continues, for His atoning sacrifice is ever present before God. It is still available to apply to our lives and pay for our sins.

Verse 34 says Christ is at the right hand of God. This is not a physical positioning of two gods, for there is one God, who is an invisible Spirit. Christ is God

manifested in human flesh, and God has no physical body outside of Christ. There is one throne in heaven, and One on the throne—Jesus (Revelation 4:2; 22:3-4). Throughout the Bible the right hand is symbolic of power and preeminence (Exodus 15:6; Psalm 110:1; Matthew 26:64; Ephesians 1:20-22; I Peter 3:22). In biblical cultures, the right arm represented strength. The most honorable place at a feast was the seat at the host's right hand.

By His sacrifice, then, the man Christ won the supreme position of power. He has power to save us. Through His atonement we have immediate access to the throne room. Hebrews 10:12 uses the same symbolism to underscore the finality of Christ's atoning work: "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."

Verse 35. The last five verses conclude that no external force can separate us from God (although we can walk away from Him, just as we chose to come to Him). To demonstrate this point, this section lists all possible obstacles and concludes that they still cannot separate us from God's love. We can classify them in six categories:

(1) *Adverse circumstances*, including tribulation (trouble), distress (hardship), persecution, famine, nakedness, peril (danger), and sword (violent death). As II Corinthians 11:23-33 reveals, Paul spoke from considerable personal experience in all these areas.

Verse 36 quotes Psalm 44:22 to show that God's people often face suffering and death for God's sake.

Verse 37. Even in these severe circumstances we are still more than conquerors through Christ. We will not eke out victory over the foe at the last second, just before

slumping in exhaustion. We will not barely drag through the pearly gates. On the contrary, we are super-conquerors. We have more than enough power in the Spirit to defeat all enemies. Through Christ, we will totally crush Satan underfoot (Romans 16:20).

Verse 38. Paul spoke from firm conviction based on the Word of God, the inspiration of the Spirit, and his own experience.

(2) *Life and death.* Some people fear what life may bring; others fear death. Neither the vicissitudes of life nor the unknown experience of death can separate us from God's love.

(3) *Powers of all kind*—angels (good or evil), rulers (human or spiritual), and any other type of power (natural or supernatural).

(4) *Time*—events of the present and the future.

Verse 39.

(5) *Space*—all space from the highest height to the deepest depth. Time and space cover all dimensions of man's finite thinking.

(6) *Anything else in creation*—any other created being, anything else conceivable, anything not covered by the preceding categories.

After exhaustively listing all possibilities, verse 39 affirms that nothing can separate us from God's love, which we have received through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have assurance of salvation.

In concluding Romans 8, we should note the importance it places on the Spirit of God. The Spirit gives us power to live righteously (verse 4) and will give us resurrection power (verse 11). The Spirit adopts us into God's family (verse 15) and is the firstfruits of our inheritance

(verse 23). In short, we must have the indwelling Spirit to be a Christian (verse 9). Through the power of the Holy Spirit we have abundant, victorious life.

Footnotes

¹Thomas, p. 163.

²Erdman, p. 77.

³Bruce, p. 136.

⁴J. Barmby, *Romans* (exposition), *The Pulpit Commentary*, H. D. M. Spence and Joseph Exell (eds.) (Rpt. 1981; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), XVIII, 293-94.

⁵Erdman, p. 79.

⁶Bruce, p. 156.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 162.

V.

The Condition of Israel

(9:1-11:36)

Israel's rejection of God's righteousness
in relation to past, present, and future

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The Condition of Israel (9:1-11:36)

To modern readers, this portion of Romans is a parenthesis; it does not appear to be directly connected to the book's central proposition. For the people of Paul's day, however, this section was of immediate relevance, for it answered then-current objections to the gospel. These objections stemmed from Israel's relationship to the gospel, particularly the apparent elimination of all distinctions between Jew and Gentile under the gospel as well as the near-universal Jewish rejection of the gospel. Romans 3:1-4 anticipated these objections.

Specifically, the Jewish rejection of the gospel caused people to raise the following questions: (1) If the doctrine of justification by faith was not new but was based on the Old Testament and on the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, why were not God's chosen people Israel receiving it? We can appreciate the force of this objection by an analogous question in our day: If the Bible truly teaches baptism in the name of Jesus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, and the Oneness of God, why are not these doctrines accepted by the vast majority of historic Christendom? (2) Why has God apparently rejected Israel, His chosen people, in favor of a predominantly Gentile church? (3) What will happen to God's promises to

Israel? Will they go unfulfilled? Will His Word fail?

Moreover, there was a danger that Gentile Christians would disparage the Jews, even Jewish Christians, because of God's apparent rejection of the Jewish nation. At the same time, there was an opposite danger that Jewish Christians might react to this situation by unduly emphasizing their Jewish traditions.

Romans 9-11 gives the following answers to the foregoing objections, putting the status of Israel in its proper perspective: (1) God's promises were never intended for all of natural Israel but only for the true children of God, that is, for those who walked by faith. (2) God is absolutely sovereign in His actions, and we have no right to question His decisions. (3) In actuality, God's rejection of Israel is not arbitrary; it is due to Israel's unbelief and stubbornness. (4) God's rejection of Israel is only partial and temporary. God still has a place for the Jews in His divine plan.

Some people use this passage to teach the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination or unconditional election. This doctrine states that God decides within Himself and foreordains who will be saved and who will be lost, without reference to human faith or human choice. Romans does not teach this doctrine. The section as a whole discusses national status, not individual salvation. It proclaims God's sovereignty but also man's free agency and moral responsibility.

A. God's Promises Are Not to All of Natural Israel (9:1-13)

(1) I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, (2)

that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. (3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (4) who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; (5) of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. (6) But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, (7) nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." (8) That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. (9) For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." (10) And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (11) (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), (12) it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." (13) As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Verse 1. The first three verses comprise a very personal introduction to the section, expressing Paul's deep burden for Israel. He began by asserting in strong terms his truthfulness. He could say these things as a Christian, with a clear conscience and with no reproof from the indwelling Spirit.

Verse 2. He lived with great sorrow (grief) and unceasing pain (anguish). These words reveal the intensity of his

burden for the unsaved Jews who had rejected their Messiah, Lord, and Savior.

Verse 3. His burden was so strong he could wish himself accursed and therefore separated from Christ if it would save his fellow Jews. This sentiment is very difficult for us to comprehend, because the law of self-preservation is instinctively foremost in our minds. We must understand Paul's words as an expression of emotion, however, not logic. He did not say he actually wished this, only "I could wish" it. Nor did he say it could in fact be done, for he taught that we are saved only by what Christ has done for us. He knew he could not add anything to Christ's atoning work, but he was willing to make any sacrifice necessary to reach the Jews with the gospel. He felt the very love of Christ for them. Paul knew he could not actually take their place, but Christ did become "a curse" for them on the cross (Galatians 3:13), and Paul felt the same love that motivated Christ.

Paul's burden for his people compares with the intercessory prayer of Moses on behalf of the Israelites after they worshiped the golden calf: "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written" (Exodus 32:32). From the example of these two successful soulwinners, we can learn much about an intercessory burden and a love for sinners.

One contributing factor that increased Paul's personal concern was the bond of natural kinship. He naturally had a special love for those of his own nation. This did not, of course, prevent him from preaching to those of other nations and races; in fact, he became the greatest missionary to the Gentiles.

Verse 4. Paul's own people were the Israelites. In verses

4-5 he listed the special blessings, privileges, or advantages God had given the Jews, which made their rejection of the gospel all the more tragic. (The list answers the objection of 3:1 more fully.)

(1) The adoption (sonship). Of all the nations, God chose the Israelites first, to bless and use them specially in His plan. "Israel is My son, My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22).

(2) The glory. God revealed His glory to Israel as to no other nation. In particular, His *shekinah* (visible glory cloud) dwelt with them in the Tabernacle.

(3) The covenants. They were heirs of the special mutual agreements between God and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David.

(4) The giving of the law. They received the highest revelation of God's Word and God's will up to that time in the Ten Commandments and law of Moses given at Mount Sinai.

(5) The service of God. God gave them special religious ordinances that taught great spiritual truths. They were in a position to serve God more completely than any other people.

(6) The promises. All the promises of the Old Testament were theirs, including promises of salvation, deliverance, healing, protection, preservation, prosperity, and other blessings.

Verse 5.

(7) The fathers. They had an illustrious ancestry of mighty men of faith and valor, beginning with Abraham.

(8) The Messiah. Finally and supremely, the Savior of the world came through their human lineage. (The Greek word *Christ* is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Messiah*,

both meaning “the Anointed One.”) Unfortunately, the Jewish nation as a whole rejected this last and greatest privilege when they rejected Jesus Christ.

As a man, Jesus Christ was born of the Jews. Verse 5 quickly adds, however, that He is also the ruler over all, the supreme God. He is the God who is blessed and who is to be blessed forever. After the flesh He was a Jew; after the Spirit He was and is God. The description of Christ’s humanity and deity here corresponds to the similar statement in 1:3-4. In all the epistle, 9:5 is the most direct and powerful affirmation of the supreme deity of Jesus Christ. It identifies Him as the one God of the Old Testament, for a Jew would never use the title *God* to refer to anyone but Jehovah: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

A few modern translations try to break the last part of verse 5 in two, separating the references to Christ and God. Thus the *Revised Standard Version* translates, “Blessed forever be God over all.” Such a translation causes an unnatural, artificial break in the verse and does not fit the context. The last part of the verse is in the process of describing Christ; there is no reason for it to conclude with an unrelated praise to God apart from Christ. It is more natural to see it as a parallel of 1:3-4, describing Christ’s humanity and deity, and as a parallel of 1:25, a similar praise that refers back to the preceding noun.

Verse 6. After presenting the problem—Israel’s unsaved condition—the passage explains that the fault did not rest with God. God’s Word has not failed. The implication is that the Jews have failed God.

Although the Jews were God’s chosen people, Israel’s

failure to accept the gospel did not mean God's Word had been ineffective or God's purpose had failed. Verses 6-13 demonstrate that, from the beginning, God's promises were never meant for all of Abraham's natural descendants but only for those who walked in the faith of Abraham. (See 4:12-13.) There is a distinction between natural Israel and spiritual Israel. Not all Israelites by natural descent are spiritual Israelites by faith. Thus it should never have been expected that all of natural Israel would inherit the promises of God.

Verse 7. Just because someone is a physical descendant of Abraham does not make him a spiritual child of Abraham or an heir of God's promises to Abraham. As John the Baptist preached, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Luke 3:8).

In demonstrating that not all of Abraham's natural descendants were automatically heirs of the spiritual promises, Paul quoted Genesis 21:12. In Genesis 21:10-12 God chose Isaac as Abraham's rightful heir and specifically excluded Ishmael from that position.

Verse 8. Ishmael was Abraham's son by Sarah's servant Hagar. As such, he represented a premature scheme by Abraham and Sarah to make God's promise come to pass by natural means. He was not the son of Abraham's legitimate wife and he was not the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham and Sarah an heir. Isaac, on the other hand, was born as a result of God's miraculous work; He was the direct fulfillment of God's promise. Thus Ishmael's descendants were only Abraham's offspring

after the flesh; they were not entitled to the special promises God gave to Abraham's heirs. God intended His promises to Abraham to be for Isaac's descendants; they were the true heirs.

Verse 9. Genesis 18:10 and 18:14 record God's promise that Sarah would bear the son who would be Abraham's heir. Isaac, not Ishmael, was the fulfillment of that promise. The implication from the preceding discussion is this: From the outset God established the dichotomy between Abraham's natural descendants and his spiritual heirs, so He is not unfair to make the same distinction still.

Verse 10. Verses 10-13 give a second example of this principle: the story of Jacob and Esau, both of whom were children of Isaac and Rebecca. As verses 12-13 explain, God chose Jacob as the heir but excluded Esau.

Verse 11 is parenthetical. It explains that God's choice to make Jacob the heir was not based on the good or evil works of the two brothers. God made the choice before they were born. This shows that the decision rests in God's power and not in the efforts of men.

Verse 12. As recorded in Genesis 25:23, God revealed to Rebecca that her younger son Jacob would gain ascendancy over her older son Esau. This prophecy applied primarily to their descendants rather than to the two brothers individually, for nowhere in Genesis do we find Esau actually serving Jacob. Indeed the full prophecy in Genesis 25:23 is, "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." God chose the descendants of Jacob to be the spiritual heirs instead of the descendants of Esau.

Verse 13. As further support, verse 13 quotes Malachi 1:2-3. Malachi wrote centuries after the events of Genesis, so again the reference is to the two nations, not the two individuals.

The statement, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” does not mean God detested Esau, loathed him, or harbored personal animosity and enmity toward him. Rather, it is an idiomatic expression indicating choice or preference. It means, “I have chosen Jacob instead of Esau.” Luke 14:26 uses similar language: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” Jesus did not ask us to despise our family, but rather to choose Him first over our family. Our love for Him must make all other loves and relationships pale in comparison.

The preceding examples do not teach that God predestines each individual to salvation or damnation without regard to man’s faith. The issue is not personal salvation at all, but rather the place of individuals and their descendants in God’s purpose for human history. God chose Jacob’s descendants to be the heirs of the Abrahamic covenant and to bring forth the Messiah, but that did not automatically ensure the personal salvation of Jacob, nor did it automatically exclude Esau from being saved. Moreover, while God planned in advance the historical role of Jacob, Jacob still had the freedom to accept or reject God’s will for his life.

Why did God choose Jacob over Esau when traditional custom of the time would have made the older brother the heir? Certainly, God foresaw that Jacob would value the birthright with its spiritual significance while Esau

would treat it cavalierly. Jacob was deceitful and sinful in his early dealings, however; and verse 11 specifically establishes that God did not base His choice on the works of either brother. Perhaps we can discern a typological significance in God's choice of heirs. Time after time in the Old Testament God reversed the normal pattern and chose the younger over the elder: Seth and Cain, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Ephraim and Manasseh, David and his brothers, Solomon and his brothers. In like manner the second Adam—Christ—has replaced the first Adam as the head of the human race. In the born-again believer the new man—the regenerated nature—has power over the old man—the unregenerated lifestyle, the dominion of sin. The older must serve the younger; the flesh must serve the Spirit. Instead of receiving our inheritance from Adam through the sinful nature, we can inherit from Christ through the indwelling Spirit.

In sum, the true people of God are the children of promise. Blessings do not come by physical lineage but by the promises of God, and, as 4:13-16 has already established, we only receive promises through faith. From the beginning, God has never bestowed blessings on the basis of human works but always by His choice and His grace.

The immediate, contextual application of this truth is that we must distinguish between natural and spiritual Israel. The overwhelming Jewish rejection of the gospel does not discredit the gospel. Rather it demonstrates that many Jews did not have Abraham's faith and were not the spiritual heirs of God's promises to Abraham.

There is also an important application for the church

today: the distinction between the visible and invisible church. The visible church consists of those who associate themselves with the visible church structure on earth. Not all of them truly have faith, however. Within this visible church is a true, invisible church of believers who actually allow God's Spirit to reign in their lives. No one is entitled to spiritual privileges, blessings, or salvation because of an outward association with the church or because of natural birth. To inherit spiritual promises, blessings, and eternal life we must be born again and continue to live by faith.

B. The Sovereignty of God (9:14-29)

(14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (15) For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." (16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth." (18) Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (19) You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" (20) But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" (21) Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? (22) What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of

wrath prepared for destruction, (23) and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, (24) even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (25) As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." (26) "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they will be called sons of the living God." (27) Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. (28) For He will finish the work and cut it short in unrighteousness, because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth." (29) And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah. "

The preceding section established that God's promises were never meant for all of Abraham's natural offspring. Therefore, it should not have been surprising that many Jews were not inheriting God's promises. This section asserts that God is sovereign in His choice of whom to bless. He does not have to reveal His reasons to us. He is just and merciful in all He does.

Verse 14. By His sovereign act, God has chosen some and rejected others. This does not make God unjust. God is righteous in exercising His sovereignty. In defending divine justice, Paul again used his characteristic phrase of emphatic denial.

Verse 15 uses Exodus 33:19 to illustrate God's freedom of choice. In particular, God has the freedom to be

merciful and compassionate. Exodus 33:19 describes God's decision to forgive Israel of their idolatry after they worshiped the gold calf.

This example was particularly relevant in answering the Jews who were raising objections to Paul's proclamation of the gospel. In effect, Paul's inspired message to them was: "Instead of finding fault with God's selection process, you should gratefully acknowledge God's sovereignty, for He used His freedom of choice to show mercy to your ancestors. Otherwise, if you insist that God be restricted in granting mercy, then the entire Jewish nation would be excluded from His choice for once and for all because of their sin at Sinai."

There is a further implication of great importance: If the Jews are willing to acknowledge God's right to forgive the sinful Jewish nation, then they must also admit God is righteous to extend mercy to the sinful Gentiles. The existence of a predominately Gentile church, then, does not compromise God's righteousness.

Verse 16. Man's salvation does not originate in human decision or human effort, but in the grace and mercy of God. Sinful man has no right to salvation; he has no ability to choose or to earn salvation in himself. Sinful man can be saved only because God has freely chosen to offer salvation to all mankind. Of course, this does not negate man's responsibility to accept and respond to God's offer.

Verse 17. Just as God has the freedom to be merciful, so He has the freedom to harden hearts. Both aspects are included in God's sovereignty. Verse 17 proves this by quoting Exodus 9:16, which records the message God gave Moses for delivery to Pharaoh. God made Pharaoh powerful and enabled him to stand in order to accomplish

God's purpose. He allowed the obstinate Pharaoh to come to Egypt's throne at that time so God could demonstrate His power and declare His name to all mankind. God would clearly reveal His omnipotence by miraculously delivering His people from the most powerful kingdom of the day.

The quotation reveals that God's name represents His power. To know God's name means more than knowing a verbal pronunciation; it means to know His power. To have His name is to have His power. The New Testament church has the highest name of Deity ever revealed to mankind—the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus is all the fulness of the Godhead incarnate (Colossians 2:9), and He has all power (Matthew 28:18). To have the name of Jesus is to have all the power of God. Thus Jesus said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14). Peter and John raised the lame man "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6). When the Sanhedrin asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" Peter replied, "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:7, 10, 12).

Verse 17 reveals the exalted nature of the inspiration of the Old Testament by its introduction of the quotation. Exodus 9:16 records a direct statement of God, but verse 17 attributes the statement to Scripture. In other words, when the Bible says something it is equivalent to God saying something.

Verse 18. To summarize, God is sovereign both in showing mercy to some and in hardening the hearts of others. This does not mean God arbitrarily and uncondi-

tionally condemns some individuals to eternal damnation. He shows mercy to the penitent and rejects the impenitent. God indeed hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 10:1) but this was due to Pharaoh's own refusal to submit to God. The Bible also states that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15) and exalted himself (Exodus 9:17). Because Pharaoh refused to listen to God, God allowed him to harden his heart and in fact hardened it further so that God's purpose might be fulfilled. Similarly, in Romans 1, God gave the Gentiles over to a reprobate mind because they did not want to retain a knowledge of Him.

God does not capriciously bless some and curse others. His Word is the same to all. He operates according to universal principles. The different results His Word produces in people's lives are due to the different conditions of their hearts, not to bias on His part. God's Word as applied to Pharaoh hardened his heart because of Pharaoh's pride and rebellion. If Pharaoh had been humble, the same Word of God would have softened him. To illustrate, the same sun hardens clay but melts wax.

God did not force Pharaoh to act as he did, but God's use of Pharaoh is a beautiful illustration of His foreknowledge. God foresaw Pharaoh's stubbornness and allowed him to attain his position, because God saw how Pharaoh could further His plans. Knowing what kind of a person Pharaoh was, He was able to use him as a tool to get His job done. If Pharaoh had been responsive to God, God could have used him to accomplish His purpose in a different way. God foresees man's hardness and works it into His plan. Either way man goes, God has a plan that will work. God ultimately prevails whether an individual obeys Him or not.

Once again, this passage uses an example that forced the Jews to agree with God's plan. If they approved of their existence as a nation, they had to acknowledge God's freedom to harden hearts. Otherwise, He was wrong to harden Pharaoh's heart and to deliver Israel from bondage. If they agreed that God acted fairly in hardening unbelieving Pharaoh, however, they would have to admit that God was righteous to harden unbelieving Israel.

Verse 19. The sovereignty of God gives rise to a further objection: How can God find fault with those who cannot resist Him? (Romans 3:5-8 had briefly touched on this problem.) Instead of immediately giving a direct answer, Paul insisted on establishing a fundamental principle first: We do not have a right to question God in this matter. The objection is moot because we cannot judge God. The real issue is reverence, submission to God. Paul did not reject the questions of a sincere seeker but the objections of an unbelieving rebel.

Verse 20. God is righteous because He is our God and Creator. Created beings do not have the right to put the Creator on trial. We cannot question God's reasons for dealing with people in certain ways.

Verse 21 uses the analogy of pottery, comparing God to a potter and man to clay. It apparently draws from Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9, both of which point out that the clay cannot question the potter. Jeremiah 18:1-11 similarly compares the nation of Israel to clay in the hands of God as the potter. The analogy does not hold true in every detail, but it does illustrate one important point: Just as the clay cannot question or rebuke the potter, so man cannot judge God. We should note that a potter's use of clay is determined in large part by the composition, quality,

and pliability of the clay. In Jeremiah 18:1-11 God established His prerogative to mold Israel as He saw fit, then declared He would forgive or judge any nation based on that nation's response to Him.

The potter has power to take the same lump of clay and make different pieces of pottery. He can designate some for noble uses and some for common or lowly uses. Similarly, God has the right to use people however He wishes.

Verse 22. What if God wants to use various vessels in various ways? We have no right to complain. Verse 22 does not say God is arbitrary in His use of people, but only says "what if." Before Romans gives any rationale for God's use of people, it first establishes that we have no right to challenge God in this area.

In actual fact, God is not arbitrary; He has been very patient with the wicked. God desires to demonstrate His wrath against sin and His power over all mankind. As God and Creator, He certainly has the right to do so any time He wishes. Yet in actual fact He has endured with great patience the objects of His eventual wrath. These people are prepared, destined, or designed for eventual destruction. By using a passive participle here, the passage refuses to say God prepared them for punishment. This contrasts sharply with the parallel statement in verse 23. The implication is that they are responsible themselves for their condemnation. God is not responsible for sin, only for grace.

Verse 23. Moreover, God wishes to demonstrate the riches of His glory toward the objects of His mercy. He has planned long ago for these people to receive glory. Unlike verse 22, an active verb clearly designates God as

the preparer of the vessels of mercy. If anyone receives mercy, the credit belongs to God; salvation comes only by God's grace and God's direct intervention. This does not mean God has predestined certain individuals to be saved. He has simply planned for all who respond to His call to receive glory, and He foreknows who will in fact respond. According to His plan, all who respond to His mercy are predestined to receive glory. (See 8:29-30 for a similar, more detailed statement.)

The emphasis, then, is upon God's mercy. To those who reject His mercy, He is still very patient. To those who accept His mercy, He will give glory.

Verse 24. God has extended His mercy to both Jews and Gentiles. The offer goes to "whosoever will." Those who respond, both among the Jews and the Gentiles, become "the called out ones." As in 8:30, the verse speaks of an effectual calling. Only those who accept the offer of salvation are actually the called of God.

Verse 25. Knowing the Jews would question whether God had called the Gentiles, the inspired apostle gave scriptural proof. First, he quoted Hosea 2:23, where God offered His mercy to those who were not His people and not His beloved.

Verse 26. Then he quoted Hosea 1:10, where God promised that those who were not His people would become sons of God. In the original context of Hosea, these two verses refer to backslidden Israel. Even though the people of Israel had lost their spiritual position because of unfaithfulness, God promised to restore them to a special relationship with Him. Verse 26 extracts a principle from these Old Testament verses and applies it to the Gentiles. If God would call backslidden Israel,

which had lost its chosen status, He would also call the Gentiles even though they did not originally have a special, chosen status.

Verse 27. Not only did the Old Testament indicate that God would call the Gentiles, it also predicted that only a remnant of Israel would be saved. This is clear from Isaiah 10:22-23. Although the Israelites were numerous, most of them were destroyed by conquest and only the remnant returned from captivity. Again, the passage extracts a principle and applies it to the existing situation. In the Old Testament God destroyed His people because of unbelief but preserved the remnant; in Paul's day God would operate the same way.

Verse 28 continues the quotation. The critical text has a shorter form for this verse, namely, "For the Lord will finish the work and cut it short upon the earth." Moreover, instead of "work," the more appropriate rendition here is "word" or "account." This short form is closer to the Hebrew text, as well as the *KJV* and *NKJV* rendering, in Isaiah. The longer form follows the Septuagint. The meaning is not significantly affected either way. The verse means, "For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality" (*NIV*).

Verse 29. As another proof, verse 29 quotes the previous words of Isaiah 1:9, again from the Septuagint. This verse demonstrates God's kindness to Israel. Unless God had extended His grace, Israel would have been totally destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. The "LORD of Sabaoth," a term which appears also in James 5:4, is a frequent Hebrew title for God in the Old Testament. It literally means "the LORD of hosts [armies]" or, in other words, "the LORD almighty."

In conclusion, Romans 9:14-29 analyzes the question of Jewish rejection and Gentile acceptance from God's point of view. Mercy and judgment belong to God alone. By definition, no one has a claim upon grace. God is not unjust to withhold grace from some. God can present conditions under which He will bestow grace, but we cannot make Him subject to any conditions.

At the same time, we must recognize that God has clearly revealed the conditions under which He exercises this sovereignty. The whole Bible testifies that God will forgive the repentant sinner. The Book of Romans teaches God will save all who put their faith in Him and obey His Word.

In actuality God's grace is far greater than we might expect. God is absolutely sovereign, but He never acts capriciously. He never condemns those who should be saved, but He always saves those who deserve to be lost.

Finally, the Old Testament predicted that God would act mercifully in calling the Gentiles and in preserving a Jewish remnant despite Jewish unbelief.

This effectively refutes any Jewish contention that either Paul's doctrine is incorrect or else God is unfair to reject Israel as a whole. First, the Jews do not even have a right to question God. Second, God's action towards the Jews is in accordance with the conditions He has already proclaimed, namely He has rejected them because of their unbelief (9:30-10:21). Third, He is acting mercifully towards everyone. Fourth, the Jews' own Scriptures indicate that God would call the Gentiles and would reject all but a remnant of Jews.

Those who teach the doctrine of unconditional election depend heavily on Romans 9, particularly verses

14-29. This is only the preliminary stage of the argument, however. Before Romans finishes the discussion of Israel's condition, it clearly dispels any notion of unconditional election or unconditional eternal security, especially in 11:17-22. All men are sinners, but by grace God has given each one the ability to accept or reject God's offer of salvation. Man is responsible to respond to God, and God elects to salvation those who respond to Him in faith.

C. God's Rejection of Israel Is Due to Israel's Unbelief (9:30-10:21)

(30) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; (31) but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness, (32) Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. (33) As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (10:1), Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. (2) For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (5) For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." (6) But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ

down from above) (7) or; “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). (8) But what does it say? “The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): (9) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (10) For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. (11) For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. (13) For “whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (14) How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (15) And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (17) So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (18) But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” (19) But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will anger you by a foolish nation.” (20) But Isaiah is very bold and says: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” (21) But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

After addressing the problem of Israel's rejection from God's point of view—establishing that God is sovereign and that man has no right to question His actions—Romans then analyzes the question from man's point of view. In actual fact, God's rejection of Israel is not arbitrary but is due to Israel's unbelief. After proclaiming God's sovereignty, Romans underscores Israel's (and man's) responsibility.

Verse 30. Verses 25-29 use the Old Testament to demonstrate how God would turn to the Gentiles and preserve only a remnant of Israel. This had come to pass in the church. Why?

Admittedly, the Gentiles did not originally seek God's righteousness. Historically, they were pagans and did not worship the true God. Nevertheless, many Gentiles had received God's righteousness, which comes through faith, because they responded in faith to the preaching of the gospel and were justified.

Verse 31. On the other hand, the Jews as a whole have not received God's righteousness. Although they zealously followed the law of righteousness, they did not actually attain righteousness. They pursued the law of Moses, which was the law of righteousness given to them, but they never actually arrived at it.

Most commentators interpret the "law of righteousness" to mean the principle of righteousness or justification by faith. It is probable that the "law of righteousness" is actually the law of Moses, since that was the specific law the Jews followed. The critical text lends support to this view by omitting the words "of righteousness" at the end of the verse. That is, the Jews pursued the law of Moses but never actually fulfilled it properly. They did not

implement it or learn from it as God had intended.

Verse 32. Why did not the Jews receive what they so diligently pursued? They pursued it by works and not by faith. Instead of trusting in God for salvation, they tried to earn salvation by works, seeking legal righteousness or righteousness by law-keeping.

Most commentators assume the pronoun *it* in the first part of the verse means the principle of righteousness, but as in verse 31 the reference could be to the law of Moses. The goal of the Jews was not wrong but their method of obtaining that goal was wrong. The words “as it were” contrast the true, correct method of implementing God’s law and receiving God’s righteousness (i.e., by faith) with a false, supposed method (i.e., by works).

The Jews misunderstood the purpose of the law. They falsely thought they could obtain righteousness by works of the law, which was a gross distortion of God’s original purpose for giving the law. God gave the law to define sin, demonstrate man’s sinfulness, prove man’s need of salvation, lead man to trust God as his only Savior, and point men to Christ (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:24). Instead, most of the Jews of Paul’s day tried to use the law as a technique to save themselves. They self-righteously trusted in their own ability to keep the law and thereby merit salvation. They lost the inner meaning of the law.

The critical text has simply “by works” instead of “by the works of the law.” If correct, this would reinforce the thought that the law of Moses itself was not to blame but rather it was Jewish failure to use it properly that is at fault. Daniel Fuller offered this explanation of verses 31-32a: “The reason for [Israel’s] failure was that she

tried to fulfill that law through her own fanciful notion of works in which she could boast, whereas the objective standard of the Mosaic law itself taught nothing but the obedience of faith which excludes all boasting.”¹

Since the Jews were seeking righteousness, or the law of righteousness, by works and not by faith, they did not recognize the Messiah when He came. He became a stumbling stone to them instead of a cornerstone (foundation). In short, God rejected the Jews because of their unbelief—because of their rejection of the Messiah.

Verse 33 combines Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16 and uses them to demonstrate the Jewish rejection of the Messiah. The former verse prophesied that God would become a stone of stumbling to Israel, a rock that causes men to fall. The latter verse promised that God would lay in Zion a foundation stone, a cornerstone, in whom men could safely trust. Romans takes the negative description of the former verse and inserts it into the positive promise of the latter verse. Christ was supposed to be the foundation stone for His people, but instead He became a rock that caused them to stumble because they refused to believe in Him.

The Hebrew text of Isaiah 28:16 says, “Whoever believes will not act hastily,” that is, will not panic. The Septuagint, quoted here, says the believer will not be ashamed, that is, embarrassed or disappointed. Either way the central idea is the same: the one who trusts God will not act hastily for he knows God will come to his rescue; his trust is not ill-founded.

Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the stone of stumbling is Jehovah (Isaiah 8:11-14), but in this context it is Jesus—another proof that Jesus is Jehovah. I Peter 2:6-8

quotes the same two verses of Isaiah and applies them to Christ.

Chapter 10, verse 1. As in 9:1-3, Paul expressed his deep burden for Israel (the critical text says for “them”) that they might be saved.

Verse 2. The situation was particularly anguishing for him because the Jews did have much zeal, but their zeal was not based on knowledge. The Jews misunderstood the plan of God, so their zeal was in vain. Paul certainly could testify to this situation, for his own life was a prime example. Before his conversion he was very zealous, seeking righteousness by works of law (Philippians 3:4-6), but all the time he rejected Christ and persecuted Christians.

Verse 3. The Jews were specifically ignorant of the proper way to receive God’s righteousness, which comes only by faith. They refused God’s way and tried to use their own method of works. This was inexcusable, for as already shown, the Scriptures taught justification by faith and pointed to the Messiah.

Verse 4. If they had sought righteousness God’s way and studied the Scriptures, they would have accepted Christ, for Christ is “the end of the law.” The Greek word translated “end” is *telos*, meaning “end, goal, outcome.” All along, the law pointed to Christ, leading man to a place where he could recognize and accept Christ as Savior. “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). *Telos* can also mean “termination or cessation,” which may be a secondary meaning here. If so, it means we are free from the law as discussed in 7:1-13 and in our note after 15:13. “But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:25). It does not mean we can disobey God’s

moral law, for God still requires the obedience of faith (16:26) and he gives us the Spirit to enable us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law (8:4). The gospel of justification by faith in Christ does not destroy the law; it establishes the law in its original purpose and meaning (3:31). The central thought is that Christ is the completion of the law; He is the culmination of all the law truly taught.

Christ is the end of the law specifically to bring righteousness to us. He is our righteousness. Everyone who believes in Him has His righteousness imputed to him. If the Jews had followed the law correctly, they would have followed the path of faith and would have trusted in Christ. In so doing they would have received the righteousness they sought.

Verse 5 describes the righteousness that comes by law. It quotes Leviticus 18:5, which records a message God gave to Moses for the Israelites. God told Israel that if they would keep his statutes and judgments they would live. The righteousness of the law, then, consists of doing.

Most commentators contrast verse 5 with verses 6-8, seeing two mutually exclusive avenues of receiving righteousness—righteousness by law or righteousness by faith. It is very important, however, to avoid any implication that man could be justified by works, even in the Old Testament, for the entire Book of Romans refutes such a doctrine. In every age, salvation has been by grace through faith based on the atoning death of Christ. Saving faith has always been expressed by obedience to God's commands for that day. Christ was the only sacrifice that could ever remit sin (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:22; 10:1-18) and the saints of the Old Testament were saved

by faith in God, both before and during the law of Moses (Romans 4; Hebrews 11).

If we are to maintain that Romans 10:5-8 presents righteousness by law in contrast to righteousness by faith, then we must admit, as most commentators do, that in actuality no one can attain righteousness by law. Righteousness by law would be only hypothetical and not actual. The law demanded perfect obedience. In theory, if someone adhered to the law perfectly he would inherit life, but in practice the sinful nature makes it impossible for anyone to live perfectly. Since all are sinners, the law cannot justify us or give us life (Galatians 3:10-12, 21). It can only condemn sinners to death. The law defines what righteousness is, but it does not confer righteousness or give power to live righteously.

There are some difficulties with this explanation of Leviticus 18:5, however. It makes God's promise of life to Israel only theoretical and not actual, portraying Him as giving an unattainable promise. It pits Moses as quoted in verse 5 against Moses as quoted in verses 6-8. It makes Romans deny the present application of Leviticus 18:5, which would be very unconvincing to Jewish objectors and which would be contrary to its frequent use of the Old Testament to support its doctrine.

There is a way to interpret verse 5 so as to avoid these difficulties. Instead of describing a scriptural contrast between two conflicting methods of obtaining righteousness—one hypothetical and one actual—perhaps Romans was simply combatting a Jewish misinterpretation of Leviticus 18:5. The Pharisees wrongly interpreted Leviticus 18:5 to proclaim righteousness by works of the law, but Romans shows how Leviticus 18:5 is to be truly

fulfilled—by the obedience of faith. There is a false “righteousness of the law”—Jewish legalism, Pharisaic misuse of the law, attempting to earn salvation by works of law. The New Testament opposes this false view when it teaches against the “law” in the Pauline epistles (Galatians 3:12; Philippians 3:9). Galatians 3:12 contrasts the words of Leviticus 18:5 with the way of faith, apparently referring to the Pharisaic misinterpretation of Leviticus 18:5.

On the other hand, there is a true “righteousness of the law,” which comes by the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). The true righteousness taught by the law is none other than the righteousness that comes by faith. This is the way to explain Mark 10:17-19, where the rich young ruler asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. Jesus did not offer salvation by works but counselled him to live for God and obey God’s Word (out of love and faith). Likewise, this is the way to explain Romans 2:13, which says, “The doers of the law will be justified.” Romans 10:5 cites Moses as the author of Leviticus 18:5, indicating that it is quoting Leviticus 18:5 to establish its true, inspired meaning as opposed to the Pharisaic misinterpretation of Leviticus 18:5. Thus, both verse 5 and verses 6-8 teach the obedience of faith as the one way of justification throughout Scripture. Verses 6-8 (Deuteronomy 30:12-14), explain how to fulfill verse 5 (Leviticus 18:5).

This second explanation of verse 5 gives full force to the connective word *for* at the beginning of the verse. Verse 4 says Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Verse 5, further elaborated upon by verses 6-8, demonstrates how this is so by showing that the law actually taught the obedience of faith.

The first explanation of verse 5 given above has merit insofar as it shows the Pharisaic interpretation of Leviticus 18:5 to be incorrect. Obviously, sinful man could not fulfill every demand of the law perfectly. Even the Old Testament recognizes that all men are sinful, need forgiveness, and cannot rely upon themselves for salvation (I Kings 8:46; II Chronicles 6:36; Psalm 14:1-3; 51:5; Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9). Old Testament saints presented sin and trespass offerings to atone for their failures. Thus it was wrong to interpret God's promise in Leviticus 18:5 as a legalistic guarantee of salvation to those who had perfect works. Even the Old Testament saints realized they had to depend upon God's mercy and grace and thus had to walk by faith. Leviticus 18:5, taken with other Old Testament passages, was never meant to be a hypothetical, unattainable offer of salvation by works. Rather, it was God's promise to have fellowship with, and provide salvation for, those who would obey His Word out of faith and who would by the same faith turn to Him in repentance, seeking mercy, when they violated His Word.

Verse 6. Verses 6-8 explain the righteousness of faith by paraphrasing Deuteronomy 30:12-14 and inserting a running commentary. Following our explanation of verse 5, verses 6-8 do not sharply contrast with verse 5 but provide the proper explanation of it. The Greek word translated "but" at the beginning of verse 6 is not the strong adversative *alla*, but the conjunction *de*, which means "and" or "but" as a weaker adversative.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 reads, "For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should

say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." Deuteronomy 30 is part of the last instructions of Moses to Israel before his death. Verses 12, 13, and 14 all end by stressing the necessity of obedience, and verse 16 predicates obedience on the command to love God.

The quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 emphasizes the availability of righteousness by faith. Man does not have to search for God's Word (and God's righteousness) afar off. It is not in the heavens far beyond man's reach. Romans applies this to Christ: we do not have to bring Christ from heaven; the Incarnation has already taken place!

Verse 7. Nor is God's Word in the depths beyond man's reach. Deuteronomy refers to the sea, but Romans makes the modern application to Christ being in the depths of the earth. The Greek word for "deep" (*KJV*) or "abyss" (*NKJV*) is *abussos*, which means "abyss, depth, underworld." Here it apparently means the abode of the dead, while in other passages it refers to the abode of demons or evil angels (Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:3). Here it refers to Christ's burial in the grave. It could also be a reference to Christ's descent into hades while His body lay in the grave, where he apparently proclaimed victory over the underworld and liberty for the righteous dead (Acts 2:27). (For possible references to the descent into hades, see also Ephesians 4:8-10, I Peter 3:19, and Revelation 1:18.) In any case, we do not need

to make the Resurrection occur; it has already happened! God has already provided everything we need to receive righteousness by faith.

Verse 8. In fact, as the Scripture says, the Word of God is very near to all. Romans makes the application to the gospel of faith that the apostles preached. God's Word and God's way of righteousness are not far away; the church is already preaching righteousness. Thus the accessibility of the message of salvation is stressed.

As our discussion of verse 5 indicates, verses 6-8 do not present a new method of salvation that contrasts with the teachings of the law and eliminates the requirement of obedience. If they did, Romans takes Deuteronomy 30:12-14 out of context and distorts its original meaning. Not only would this have been poor hermeneutics, but it would have defeated the earlier use of the Old Testament to support the doctrine of justification by faith (Romans 4) and it would not have convinced Paul's Jewish opponents. Romans gives the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 and uses it properly. It does not use the words loosely but cites scriptural support for its doctrine.

Romans uses Deuteronomy 30:12-14 to describe the way to receive the righteousness taught by the law. The passage in Deuteronomy is not merely prophetic of the New Testament; it had direct application to those under the law. It is an example in the law itself that righteousness is by faith. The only way to receive righteousness is by faith (Romans 10:6), by believing and confessing (Romans 10:9-10), or in other words by the obedience of faith (Deuteronomy 30:12-14). Whereas Deuteronomy 30:12-14 says God's commandment is readily available to

Israel so that they can hear and obey it, the paraphrase in Romans says Christ (Romans 10:6-7) and the preaching of Christ (Romans 10:8) are available to all. Thus both the law and the preaching of Christ point to the same conclusion: the obedience of faith.

Verse 9. Confession and belief are the bases of final salvation. The two words point to outward and inward conformity to God's Word.

The first requirement for salvation mentioned here is to "confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus." This literally means to "confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'" (NIV). It is more than a mechanical verbal formula, however, for the confession must be truthful and sincere. Many will verbally confess Jesus as Lord but will not be saved (Matthew 7:21-23). For Jesus to be truly Lord of our lives, we must submit to Him as our master and obey His Word. As Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Confessing Jesus as Lord, then, is the obedience of faith.

In particular, confessing Jesus as Lord occurs initially when we repent from sin, are baptized in His name, and receive His Spirit. At baptism we call on the name of the Lord for the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16). Only by the Spirit can we truly confess Jesus as Lord (I Corinthians 12:3). The Spirit must illuminate our minds to understand who Jesus really is and the Spirit must give us the power required to obey Him daily as Lord. Bruce comments, "This is the confession . . . which, as Paul says in I Corinthians xii. 3 no-one can make except 'in the Holy Spirit'. . . If we are to think of one outstanding occasion for such a confession to be made, we should more

probably think of that first confession . . . made in Christian baptism.”²

The second prerequisite for salvation is to “believe in your heart that God has raised [Jesus] from the dead.” As discussed in Part III, saving faith includes obedience to God’s Word. The “heart” means man’s innermost being, and belief from the heart involves the emotions, the intellect, and the will. If we truly believe on Jesus, we will have a threefold witness in our lives: blood, water, and Spirit (I John 5:1, 8-10).

The specific object of faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ’s resurrection is the culminating event of the gospel, which is Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4). It takes no faith to acknowledge Christ’s death and burial; only those who accept His miraculous resurrection actually believe in the supernatural power of God. Christ’s death would have no power to justify without the resurrection (Romans 4:25; I Corinthians 15:17). Belief in Christ’s resurrection, then, is a shorthand version for belief in the entire gospel message, specifically the atoning work of Christ for our salvation. Of course, mental acceptance without response or appropriation is not enough. We specifically rely upon Christ’s resurrection and apply it to our own lives by living a new life in the Spirit (Romans 6:4; 7:6; 8:2).

The Pulpit Commentary explains confession and belief well:

Confession of the Lord Jesus with the mouth must be taken to express generally, not only fearless avowal of the Christian faith, but also consistent life . . . The belief spoken of is . . . a living operative faith, not intel-

lectual conviction only. Nor is belief that God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead to be taken as meaning belief of this one article of the Creed alone; it carries with it belief in the gospel generally.³

Verse 10 restates the two essentials of verse 9 and distinguishes their functions. Belief leads us to righteousness, that is, to justification by faith. Confession leads us to salvation, the ultimate and permanent deliverance we shall receive at the coming of Christ (Romans 8:23-25; 13:11; I Peter 1:5, 9). We maintain our present salvation and have assurance of future salvation by continuing to confess in word and deed that Jesus is Lord of our lives. "By faith alone we are justified; but by confession in actual life, which is the fruit of faith, our salvation is secured."⁴

Verses 9-10 then, express in a brief statement the gospel message (verse 8), which in turn harmonizes with the true teaching of the law (verses 5-8). Felix Fluckiger's explanation of Romans 10:5-10, quoted with approval by Daniel Fuller, is very helpful:

Moses required that a man must do the righteousness required by the law, in order to live. But this requirement is not fulfilled by superhuman achievements . . . [The righteousness required by the law] is fulfilled rather through the Word which is in the heart and in the mouth—which according to 10:10 is faith and confessing the Lord . . . The life which Moses promises according to 10:5 is therefore to be enjoyed by those who believe and confess. The obedience of faith thus becomes the proper fulfilling of the law, which requires righteousness and promises life to those who do righteousness.⁵

Many people use verses 9-10 as a mechanical formula for salvation and deny that such things as repentance, water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are in any way part of New Testament salvation. We should instead see belief and confession as the bases of salvation, which encompass everything the New Testament commands man to fulfill. Several points show that belief and confession are not different from, or exclusive of, the Acts 2:38 message.

(1) *Paul was writing to born-again persons; he was not explaining to unbelievers how to be born again.* He knew he could briefly summarize the gospel's message by referring to these two fundamental principles without being too vague or being misunderstood.

(2) *In the context, Romans explains that God's rejection of Israel was due to Israel's unbelief.* For Israel to be saved, the fundamental issue was confession of and belief in Jesus. Paul did not confront the Jews over water baptism or the Holy Spirit baptism. They had to resolve a more basic issue first: accepting Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Savior. If they would only do this, all else would follow.

(3) *Romans does not discount the necessity of obedience to God's Word.* The Old Testament text used, Deuteronomy 30:11-14, places strong emphasis on obedience. God's Word is available to us precisely in order for us to obey it. Romans 10:16 likewise emphasizes obedience, equating a lack of obedience with a lack of faith. (See our notes, "Definition of saving faith" after chapter 3 and "A complete look at justification," after chapter 4.)

(4) *Properly understood, belief and confession include obedience to the Acts 2:38 message, as already*

shown in the commentary on verse 9. Belief and confession certainly mean more than mental and verbal acknowledgement, for even demons believe and confess Christ to that extent (Matthew 8:29; James 2:19).

(5) *The emphasis in verses 6-10 is on the availability of the message Paul preached.* We must understand the exhortation to believe and confess in that light. Namely, we are to believe and confess what Paul and the other apostles preached. Paul taught “believers” to be baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Acts 19:1-6).

Verse 11. While verses 6-10 emphasize the availability and accessibility of salvation, verses 11-13 emphasize that salvation is for everyone. Verse 11 quotes the last part of Isaiah 28:16 again but uses an extra word to stress that everyone who believes in Christ will be saved. Romans 9:33 literally says, “The [one] believing on him will not be put to shame,” but Romans 10:11 literally says, “Everyone believing on him will not be put to shame.”

Verse 12. God offers salvation to both Jews and Greeks (i.e., Gentiles, as in 1:16). There is no distinction or discrimination by race, national origin, or culture. The riches of God’s grace are available to everyone who calls on Him.

Verse 13. To support the statement of God’s impartiality, verse 13 quotes Joel 2:32. “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved,” with the emphasis on *whoever*. As with verses 9-10, verse 13 is not a mechanical formula for salvation exclusive of obedience to the gospel. Merely calling on the Lord verbally does not save (Matthew 7:21-23). To call on Jesus means to pray to Him, casting oneself totally upon Him for mercy and

depending solely on Him for salvation. Genuinely calling on the Lord requires faith (verse 14), and genuine faith includes obedience (verse 16). Peter applied the same verse in Joel to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21). Calling on the name of the Lord also includes calling His name at baptism (Acts 22:16).

We should note that in Joel the promise of salvation was to all who called upon Jehovah, but Romans applies the promise to those who called upon Jesus, again proving the identity of Jehovah and Jesus.

Verse 14. Verses 14-17 explain how people can have faith, preparatory to showing how the Jews had every opportunity to believe. By a series of rhetorical questions, the passage lists in reverse order the steps needed for one to believe on Christ and call on Him:

- (1) Sending preachers of the gospel.
- (2) Preaching the gospel of Christ.
- (3) Hearing the gospel of Christ.
- (4) Believing in Christ.
- (5) Calling on Christ.

Clearly, God does not count as innocent those who have never heard the gospel. As chapters 1-3 teach, all men have an opportunity to know God through nature and conscience and all are condemned as sinners whether they are judged by law or conscience. Their only hope of salvation is by faith in Christ, but without the preaching of the gospel they cannot have faith in Him.

Verse 15 records the first necessary step—the sending of preachers. The quotation in praise of preaching is from Isaiah 52:7. (The critical text renders the quotation as simply, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tid-

ings of good things!") Nahum 1:15 also contains similar language. The verse underscores the importance of sending preachers throughout all the world. Man's hope of salvation depends on the sending of gospel preachers.

Verse 16. Unfortunately, not everyone who hears the gospel obeys it. As Paul recorded those words, perhaps he thought particularly of the Jews, who as a whole had not obeyed the gospel. As expressed in Isaiah 53:1, the people did not believe Isaiah's message. There is a significant and essential connection here between faith and obedience. A lack of obedience indicates, and is equivalent to, a lack of faith.

Verse 17. To summarize, faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ. The Greek word for "report" in verse 16 is the same as the Greek word for "hearing" in verse 17. The "word" is not the general word *logos* but the more particularized, specific word *rhema*, here meaning "message, command, order, or direction," that is, the preaching of Christ. People are able to have faith in Christ only if they have heard the preaching of Christ.

Verse 18. Verses 18-21 present the conclusion about the Jews, showing they had the opportunity to know Christ as outlined in verses 14-17. They could not offer the excuse of ignorance.

Does the preceding analysis of how faith comes explain why the Jews have not believed in Christ? Specifically, have they not believed because they have not heard the preaching of Christ? No, they have heard. The gospel has been preached to the Jews throughout the world, but they have rejected it. For example, on Paul's missionary journeys he always went first to the

Jewish synagogue to proclaim the gospel. Not only the Jews in Palestine but also the Jews in major Gentile cities had heard the gospel.

This brought to mind the words of Psalm 19:4, which describes how God's work of creation, particularly the heavens, have heralded the truth of His existence throughout all the world. Paul did not use Psalm 19:4 as a direct prophecy but only as a comparison or a literary allusion. Just as the message of the heavens has been universally proclaimed, so the gospel has been proclaimed to Jews everywhere.

Verse 19. Is Jewish unbelief due to a lack of knowledge? No, they had adequate knowledge of the truth (even in their own Scriptures). In fact, the Scriptures indicated God would turn to the Gentiles. Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32:21 and extracted a principle from it. Because of Jewish idolatry, God said He would turn to those who were not a chosen nation, to those who did not have spiritual understanding. He would use them to provoke Israel to jealousy and anger. If Israel saw God's blessings on the Gentiles, perhaps it would motivate them to seek after God earnestly and receive those same blessings, which they had forfeited (Romans 11:11, 14).

Verse 20. Likewise verse 20 quotes Isaiah 65:1 and uses a principle from it. Isaiah went even further than Moses in asserting that God would turn to the Gentiles and bless them even though they were not His covenant people. Though they did not originally seek after Him (9:30), yet He would reveal Himself to them.

Verse 21. At the same time, God has been very patient with rebellious Israel. As Isaiah 65:2 describes, He has continually extended His hand to the Jews, but they

have disobeyed Him and contradicted the truth. The *KJV* word *gainsaying* means “contrary, obstinate, contradicting truth.”

Disobedience and obstinacy indicate unbelief. In sum, God did not arbitrarily reject Israel; He was very patient with Israel. God has rejected Israel because of their own unbelief and disobedience. Israel fell because they did not follow the obedience of faith.

D. Present Remnant and Future Restoration of Israel (11:1-36)

Chapters 9-10 explain why God has rejected Israel. Chapter 11 Explains what will happen to God's promises to Israel. God has not annulled His promises. He still has a place for the Jew, and He still has plans to restore the Jewish nation. The rejection of Israel is only partial and temporary. Some Jews still believe in God and so inherit His promise. One day the Jewish nation as a whole will again turn to God in faith and will inherit His promises to them.

1. Israel's rejection is only partial (11:1-10)

(1) I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. (2) God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, (3) "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? (4) But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (5) Even so then, at this present time there is a

remnant according to the election of grace. (6) And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (7) What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened. (8) Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." (9) And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and recompense to them; (10) let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always."

Verse 1. God has not rejected Israel completely. Paul emphatically denied such an idea. Paul himself was an example to the contrary. He was a descendant of Abraham, an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, and yet he was part of the church. Although God has rejected Israel as a whole because of unbelief, individual Jews can by faith still participate fully in God's plan and receive His blessings.

Verse 2. God has not disowned or repudiated the people whom He chose originally. God selected Israel as His chosen people from the start, so He will not utterly reject them. There are still some who have faith in Him and with whom He can work. Perhaps there is an implication that since God knows the future with certainty, He was able to choose a people whom He knew would not completely fail.

A similar situation had occurred in Elijah's time, and God still had a faithful Israelite remnant then. "Wot" in the *KJV* means "know." The Greek text literally reads, "Do you not know what the Scripture says *in* Elijah," meaning

the portion of Scripture concerning Elijah.

Verse 3. In I Kings 19:10 and again in 19:14 Elijah complained or appealed to God against Israel. He claimed all Israel had forsaken Jehovah, killed all His prophets, and torn down all His altars. He thought he alone of all Israel still worshiped the true God, and he expected unbelieving Israel to kill him, too.

Verse 4. God responded to him in I Kings 19:18, assuring him that there was a remnant of seven thousand who still worshiped the true God and refused to worship Baal.

Verse 5. The parallel is clear. In Paul's day also it seemed all Israel had forsaken God. The Gentiles should not think, however, that no Jews were going to be saved or used of God. Even in the age of the predominantly Gentile church, there is still a Jewish remnant. A minority of Jews have received God's grace. God has chosen them by His grace (as indeed is the case of everyone who is saved).

Verse 6. If the Jewish remnant is saved by grace, then obviously God did not choose them on the basis of works. One can only receive grace (the unmerited favor of God) through faith. If one could earn grace by works then grace would not be grace—it would not be unmerited. The Jews who are saved, then, are saved just like everyone else in the church—by grace through faith—not by Jewish legalism.

The second half of the verse ("But if it is of works . . .") is absent from the oldest manuscripts and therefore from the critical text. Many conclude it was originally a marginal notation or a scribal attempt to make the verse symmetrical. In any case, it states the negative corollary of the first half of the verse.

Verse 7 states the conclusion about Israel's present condition. A godly Jewish remnant saved by grace through faith has attained righteousness. This is the "election" (*KJV*), the "elect" (*NKJV*), or the chosen ones. The majority of Israel has not attained righteousness, however. God has hardened the majority of the Jews because of their unbelief. The *KJV* says "blinded"; the Greek word means "hardened or made insensitive."

Calvinists speak of "the elect" as those God has unconditionally chosen to be saved, without reference to their response to Him. The preceding section (9:30-10:21) shows, however, that God has rejected the Israelites because of their unbelief. The entire Book of Romans, and chapter 11 in particular, shows that God chooses those who respond to Him in faith. Certainly, salvation comes by God's election and God's grace, but man receives God's election and grace through his faith (Romans 3:22-24; Ephesians 2:8-9). God initiates the salvation process by extending an offer to everyone (Romans 10:11-13; 11:32), but He elects only those who respond in faith.

Verse 8. In typical fashion, Romans uses the Old Testament to confirm its analysis of the Jewish situation. Unpalatable as its conclusions might seem to the Jewish nation, throughout chapters 9-11 Romans supports its assertions with their own Scriptures. To back up the statement that God had hardened Israel Romans uses Isaiah 29:10 with Deuteronomy 29:4. The wording also brings to mind Isaiah 6:9-10, used by Jesus to describe Israel's rejection of Him (Matthew 13:14-15).

God has given Israel a spirit of numbness, insensibility, or torpor. He has given them blind eyes and deaf ears. God did not do this capriciously, but the context of Isaiah

indicates He did this as a divine penalty for Israel's refusal to heed His Word.

Verse 9. Likewise Psalm 69:22-23, quoted from the Septuagint, testifies that the Jews would stumble and become blind. These words are David's prayer for God to judge his adversaries. Since verse 21 applies to Christ's crucifixion, verses 22-23 signify judgment upon those who have rejected Christ.

The "table" of the Jews was their table of privilege—their holy feasts, their bountiful food, and generally their blessings from God. They dedicated their sacred feasts to Jehovah, eating before Him or in His presence (Leviticus 23:6; Deuteronomy 12:7, 18; 14:23). The feasts thus represented divine fellowship and covenant blessings. Because of Jewish sinfulness, however, these special blessings actually became a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution. Their blessings actually came "rebounding as a boomerang upon them" (*Amplified*), because "to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

Verse 10. The rest of the quotation describes their eyes as darkened and their backs as bent forever under heavy burdens. The reference to spiritual blindness links this quotation with verses 7-8.

2. Israel's rejection is only temporary (11:11-32)

(11) I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. (12) Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! (13) For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the

Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, (14) if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. (15) For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (16) For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. (17) And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, (18) do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. (19) You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." (20) Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. (22) Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. (23) And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. (24) For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (25) For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (26) And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; (27) for this is My

covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” (28) Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. (29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (30) For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, (31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. (32) For God has committed them all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.

Verse 11 opens the section with a question similar in construction to that of verse 1, and it gives the same emphatic negative answer. God’s rejection of Israel is not final. The Israelites have stumbled but they are not beyond recovery; their predicament is not incurable. They have fallen temporarily, not permanently.

In fact, the stumbling of Israel has set in motion a series of events that will lead to Israel’s ultimate restoration. Through Israel’s fall salvation came to the Gentiles. Gentile salvation will provoke the Jews to jealousy so that they will again desire God’s blessings. (This will fulfill Deuteronomy 32:21, quoted in Romans 10:19.)

Verse 12. If Israel’s fall brought the riches of God’s grace to the Gentiles, how much more will Israel’s reinstatement bring blessings to the world! Israel’s “fullness” is the conversion of a large number of Jews. It parallels the “fullness of the Gentiles” (11:25).

God will bring about Jewish restoration because it will benefit everyone greatly. This passage does not explain how it will, but a study of eschatology indicates that immediately after the Jews turn to God and acknowledge

Jesus as their Messiah, Christ will establish His millennial kingdom on earth. (See Zechariah 12-14 with Revelation 19-20.) The Gentiles have no reason to exult in the Jewish downfall, but rather have an incentive to seek Jewish salvation. Although the Jewish fall has brought great blessings to them, they have even more to gain from a Jewish restoration.

We should not infer that Gentile salvation was an accidental interlude in the divine plan or that God would not have included the Gentiles in His church if the Jews had accepted the Messiah initially. Many Old Testament passages, including many quoted in Romans, show that all along God intended to include the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6; 54:5; Joel 2:28; Romans 9:25-26; 10:11-13, 19-20; 15:9-12). If the Jews as a whole had accepted the Messiah, God would have still provided an opportunity for the Gentiles to be saved. He seeks to unite both Jews and Gentiles into His church (Romans 1:16; 15:7-9; Ephesians 2:11-16; 3:3-7.) Nevertheless, in actual fact, Jewish rejection of the Messiah has been the avenue for Gentile salvation. For example, in Paul's own ministry, he turned to the Gentiles in city after city when the Jews rejected his message. The Gentile believers came to the forefront in both numbers and influence, taking over the position in God's plan that the Jews had traditionally enjoyed.

Israel's unbelief and resulting fall, then, was not God's desire. In His providence, however, God transformed this disaster into a blessing for the Gentiles. Moreover, even the disaster itself contains seeds of ultimate victory. This is a dramatic testimony to the omnipotence, omniscience, and sovereignty of God.

Verse 13 addresses the Gentiles in particular, who

comprised the majority of the Roman church. Paul was divinely called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (1:1, 5; 15:15-16), and he made the most he could of his ministry. He literally said, "I glorify my ministry" (but he did not exalt himself).

Verses 13-25 thus comprise an aside to the Gentiles. Paul did not just deal with Jewish problems and objections in this passage. He also wrote for the benefit of the Gentiles, exercising his office of apostle to the Gentiles to show how their salvation would aid the Jews and how Jewish reconversion would bless the Gentiles.

Verse 14. In ministering to the Gentiles, Paul hoped to save many of his fellow Jews. The more he stressed his ministry to the Gentiles, leading them into God's blessings, the more he would arouse the Jews to envy, thus encouraging some of them to seek the same blessings of New Testament salvation. This restates the idea of verse 11, and in fact the Greek text uses the same word as in verse 11, meaning "to provoke to jealousy." The *KJV* says here, "provoke to emulation."

Verse 15 restates the thought of verse 12. If God's rejection of Israel has led to the world being reconciled to Him, how much more will God's eventual acceptance of them mean to the world! In fact, it will mean life from death. This perhaps refers to spiritual revival in the end. It may refer specifically to the resurrection of the dead after Jewish acceptance of Christ, particularly if one believes in a post-tribulation rapture.

Verse 16. There will be a national restoration of Israel based on their original holy relationship with God. The passage uses two illustrations to make the point. First, when a portion of flour or a cake is consecrated to God

as the firstfruits, then the whole batch or the whole loaf is consecrated. (See Numbers 15:17-21.) Second, if the roots of a tree are holy then so are the branches, for the whole tree draws life and support from the roots. The firstfruits and the roots represent the patriarchs, the original Israelites who believed God. The whole batch and the branches represent the modern nation of Israel in God's plan.

Verse 17. Verses 17-24 extend the metaphor of the olive tree, using it to warn the Gentiles. Even in discussing the Jewish situation, Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, was alert to every opportunity to fulfill his apostolic calling to the Gentiles. In the metaphor, the root is original Israel, the branches are present-day Israelites, the fatness (sap, nourishment) is Israel's divine blessing, and the wild olive tree (which bears no fruit) is the Gentile race. God broke off some (most) of the present-day Israelites, separating them from His sustaining blessings. He grafted in Gentiles, who had no spiritual inheritance or spiritual fruit in themselves, putting them on an equal basis with the remnant of the Jews. He thereby enabled these Gentiles to enjoy the same promises and blessings first given to the Hebrew patriarchs.

Verse 18. The Gentiles in the church should not boast of their position in God, however, or feel superior to the Jews. If they are tempted to do so, they should remember that the roots support the branches and not vice versa. They only stand because of the Hebrew patriarchs of faith. Salvation came to the Gentiles through the Jews.

Verse 19. Gentile believers may think they have replaced modern Jews in God's plan.

Verse 20. This is certainly true. The Jews were not

replaced just to benefit the Gentiles, however. They were cut off because of their own unbelief. This should remind all of us that we stand only by faith—by continually maintaining obedient faith in God. The Greek text places extra emphasis on “by faith.” There is no room for arrogance or conceit, but we must have fear. Godly “fear” is not doubt, but it is a sense of reverence and awe. It means to be afraid of losing our place in God, and so to be watchful and timid of doing evil.

Verse 21. Our fear has a basis in reality: God did not withhold judgment from the people He chose originally, so He certainly will not spare us if we are disobedient like they were.

Verse 22. God is both good (kind) and severe (stern). Those who fell by unbelief incurred His strict justice, but we who believe experience His kindness. (The critical text specifically says the kindness “of God.”) As long as we continue in His kindness without treating it lightly, we will continue to enjoy it, but if not we too shall be cut off.

This statement clearly refutes the doctrine of unconditional eternal security, perseverance of the saints, or “once saved always saved.” We certainly can have confidence and assurance of salvation (Romans 8:31-39), but only if we have faith and godly fear (verse 20) and continue in that faith (verse 22). We must have persistent, persevering faith, and it does not come automatically. “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6). If we do not continue to walk by faith that is obedient, then the consequences are clear: We will cut ourselves off from God’s grace and lose our salvation even as the unbelieving Jews of Paul’s day did.

Verse 23. Moreover, God is able to restore Israel to their original position if they will turn to Him in faith. Gentile boasting against the Jews is excluded, then, for two reasons: (1) The Gentiles can fall through unbelief just as the Jews did. (2) The Jews can be converted through faith just as the Gentiles were.

Verse 24. After all, if God would save those who originally were not His chosen people and did not worship Him, how much more will He save those who originally were His chosen people and had a relationship with Him! If He was willing to graft in wild olive branches (Gentiles), He is certainly willing to graft the natural branches (Jews) back into their own olive tree.

The wild branches were grafted “contrary to nature.” This may simply mean grafting itself does not occur in nature. One does not expect branches of one kind of tree to appear on another, and neither would one ordinarily expect Gentiles to inherit blessings promised to Jews. The phrase may have a deeper significance, in that one ordinarily grafts something superior onto something inferior. Just by adding one shoot of higher quality, all the resources of the original tree become available to produce superior fruit. In the metaphor of this passage, however, something inferior was grafted onto something superior. Wild olive branches produce no fruit, so ordinarily there is no advantage in grafting them onto another tree. The Gentiles had nothing to add to Jewish heritage or to God’s plan, yet contrary to nature God grafted them in for their own benefit.

Verse 25. God is able and willing to restore Israel (verse 24), and in fact there will be a future restoration of Israel. God still has a plan for the nation of Israel. Paul

wanted the church to be aware of this truth. The word *mystery* in his typical usage means something in God's plan previously hidden but now revealed. Paul explained this secret plan so that the predominantly Gentile church would not be conceited. Literally, he said, "Do not be wise in yourselves." (Practically the same Greek phrase appears in 12:16.)

God has hardened Israel in part (11:7). The hardening is only partial because even now there is a remnant of believing Jews. This situation will continue until the full number of Gentiles has been saved. This is the time when, in God's plan, the Gentiles have been given sufficient opportunity and God decides to deal with the Jews again on a national basis. Substantially the same phrase occurs in Christ's discourse on the endtime (Luke 21:24).

Verse 26. Then will come Israel's national salvation. We should note that this verse speaks of national salvation and restoration, not the salvation of every individual Jew. Individual salvation is always predicated upon personal faith. Verse 26 does not mean all Jews will be saved any more than verse 15 means all the world will be saved.

We should also note that this passage clearly predicts a national restoration of Israel, which cannot be spiritualized to apply to the New Testament church. Chapters 9-11 clearly distinguish natural, national Israel from the Gentiles and from the New Testament church. The teaching here relates to the salvation of national Israel in the endtime, as prophesied in Zechariah 12:10 and 13:8-9. It will be fulfilled literally, and does not apply "spiritually" to the church.

As usual, Romans supports its teaching with Old Testament Scripture, namely Isaiah 59:20. The Redeemer

will come to turn away Israel from sin. The Old Testament Hebrew text emphasizes each individual's responsibility to repent of his sins, while Romans emphasizes Christ's work in turning the nation from ungodliness.

Verse 27. The quotation continues from Isaiah 59:21 and 27:9. The latter verse comes from an entire passage about Israel's restoration. Jeremiah 31:33-34 also contains similar wording. The promise is that God will make a covenant with Israel and take away their sins.

Verse 28. In addition to the proof from Scripture, this passage offers proof based on God's plan (verse 28) and God's nature (verse 29). Both verses demonstrate the faithfulness of God despite human failure. The Jews are now "enemies" of God and of the church because they reject the gospel. They are estranged from God and the church. As already mentioned in verses 11-15, God used this estrangement for the benefit of the Gentiles, to bring salvation to them. Despite the present breach, however, the Jews are beloved of God because of the promises He gave to their forefathers.

Verse 29. God never withdraws His gifts or calling. He never changes His mind concerning His plans. Individuals and nations may disqualify themselves through unbelief and disobedience, thus losing their spiritual inheritance, but their changed status is never God's doing. The contextual application of this principle is as follows: because God once chose the nation of Israel and gave them special promises, He will always continue to offer those covenant blessings. They have presently forfeited those gifts through unbelief, but because of his divine plan He will not give up on them as a nation.

Verse 30. Finally, verses 30-32 offer proof of Israel's

national re-establishment based on God's mercy. The Gentiles, who now enjoy salvation, were once disobedient to God, yet through the disobedience of the Jews the Gentiles have obtained mercy. The Gentiles did not deserve salvation, yet God used the Jews to bring salvation to them.

Verse 31. Likewise, the Jews do not now deserve salvation, but God will use the Gentiles to bring it to them. The disobedient Jews will receive mercy through the mercy now bestowed on the believing Gentiles. Verses 11 and 14 have already explained how Gentile salvation will lead to Jewish salvation.

Verse 32. In short, no one deserves salvation. Both Jews (in the present) and Gentiles (in the past) have failed God. God counts everyone as disobedient (unbelieving). Literally, He has "shut up or bound up" everyone. "God has all men penned together in the prison of disobedience" (*Phillips*). His plan is to have mercy on everyone (including the disobedient Jews), offering salvation to everyone without distinction.

3. Doxology (11:33-36)

(33) Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (34) "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" (35) "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" (36) For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Romans concludes the discussion of the Jewish position with a passage of praise to God. Why is such a

passage particularly appropriate here? We have just seen a small portion of God's great providence in working out a plan of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. Amazingly, this plan uses Jewish unbelief to accomplish that goal. Jewish unbelief led directly to the salvation of the Gentiles. Gentile salvation will lead to the salvation of Israel, so God is indirectly using Jewish unbelief to bring about their own eventual salvation as a nation. No matter what man does, God always has a plan to compensate for man's failure and to lead him back into the divine will (Romans 9:17; 11:12).

Verse 33 expresses wonder at the depth of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is insight, judgment, ability to discern accurately and choose correctly. Knowledge is understanding of truth, comprehension of fact, awareness of information. God has displayed both in His plan for man's salvation. (An alternate and grammatically valid translation is to treat riches, wisdom, and knowledge as three separate qualities.) God's decisions, reasons, and methods are totally beyond man's comprehension. For this reason we worship and trust Him.

Verse 34 quotes Isaiah 40:13, with probable reference to Jeremiah 23:18 as well, to describe how God's ways are much higher than our ways. No one counsels God. No one can fathom the mind of God, and no one is smart enough to give Him advice. He does not need such help from anyone, for He is omniscient.

Verse 35. Job 41:11 affirms that no one has a claim against God. No one has ever contributed anything new to Him, and God does not owe anyone anything. He is totally self-sustaining.

Verse 36. All things have their source in Him, are sus-

tained by Him, and serve His purpose. To God belongs all glory throughout eternity.

Footnotes

¹Fuller, pp. 73-74.

²Bruce, p. 205.

³Barmby, *The Pulpit Commentary*, XVIII, 293-94.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁵Felix Fluckiger, "Christus, des Gesetzes telos," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 11 (1955), 155, quoted in Fuller, p. 70.

VI.

Practical Exhortations For Christian Living (12:1-15:13) God's righteousness in practical life

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Practical Exhortations For Christian Living (12:1-15:13)

The doctrinal exposition of Romans ends with chapter 11, but the letter is not yet concluded. This last part of the epistle's argument applies theology to practical Christian living. This section thus demonstrates the essential connection between doctrine and life. There is no contradiction between justification and sanctification by faith on the one hand and these practical exhortations on the other hand. The former inevitably leads to the latter and is not complete without the latter.

These practical exhortations cover all aspects of Christian life. Chapter 12 deals with the Christian's conduct as a member of the church—his relationship to God, to the corporate body, and to individuals. Then chapter 13 describes the Christian's responsibilities to civil government and to all mankind. Chapters 14-15 explain how to handle differences of opinion among believers with respect to morally neutral issues.

There are many parallels between Romans 12-13 and Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7; see Luke 6). Although none of the four Gospels was written by this time, probably the church circulated Christ's teachings in various oral and even written forms (Luke 1:1), and these were perhaps available to Paul. This section treats

several topics also discussed in I Corinthians 8, 10, 12, and 13: the body of Christ, spiritual gifts, love, and Christian liberty.

A. Conduct as Members of the Church (12:1-21)

The discussion of practical Christian living begins with the Christian's relationship to God, for all other relationships are built on this. Christians are called to consecrate themselves wholly to God. Then the chapter discusses the Christian's place in the church, the body of Christ. Christians must identify their individual spiritual gifts and offices and learn to exercise them in humility. Finally, the chapter presents a number of basic principles relative to Christian character. These principles embody the law of love. They focus primarily on the Christian's conduct as a member of the church and his treatment of fellow believers.

1. Consecration to God (12:1-2)

(1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Verse 1 urges the readers to establish a right relationship with God by consecrating themselves wholly. Paul used a favorite word—*beseech*—to phrase this as an exhortation instead of a command. The word means “to exhort, entreat, appeal, plead, beg, urge.” This approach is characteristic of Romans, and indeed characteristic of

the New Testament in contrast to the Old. That this verse is an appeal to the spiritual nature instead of a command to the sinful nature makes it no less necessary for Christians to heed and obey.

The exhortation is linked with the preceding doctrinal exposition by the word *therefore*, emphasizing the essential unity of doctrine and life. The purpose for doctrine is to produce consecrated lives. Specifically, the plea is based on the mercies of God, which include justification, sanctification, and other blessings from God's compassionate grace discussed in chapters 1-11. In view of these benefits of salvation, Christians are urged to respond in consecration. It is important to note that we do not earn salvation by consecration and moral reform. To the contrary, the mercies of God freely bestowed upon us in salvation motivate, enable, and issue forth in holy living.

Christians are to present their bodies to God. The Greek word translated as "present" here means "to yield, offer, dedicate." It is the same word translated as "yield" in 6:13 and 6:19 of the *KJV*. We are to offer up our bodies. By implication this includes soul and spirit, for we can only offer up the body by consent of the inner man and the inner man can only serve God through the body. Attempting to serve God in the mind or spirit alone is not enough; our service to God must produce an actual transformation of our physical behavior.

The Christian is to be a living sacrifice. This is Old Testament language, but with a significant difference. The Old Testament sacrificial animal was forced to give up its ordinary pursuits, its independence of movement, its will, and ultimately its life through death. We are urged to sacrifice all these things voluntarily, and not through death

but through continued life. We trade the old life of self-will for new and abundant life in the will of God. God asks for living human sacrifice—people who will live their lives totally dedicated and committed to Him.

To fulfill God's design for us, we must adopt the attitude of sacrifice in our living. To the world, the flesh, and the carnal mind, the Word of God sometimes seems narrow or unduly restrictive. In such cases we must remember that the Christian life is indeed a sacrifice, that God's Word and God's will must take priority over all ambitions, philosophies, traditions, and habits. By offering ourselves as living sacrifices we become holy (separated and consecrated) and pleasing to God.

This is our reasonable service. The Greek word translated as "reasonable" is *logikos*, meaning "rational or spiritual." If the connotation of "spiritual" predominates here, then the emphasis is on spiritual sacrifice as opposed to literal, physical sacrifice. It seems more likely that the primary meaning here is "rational, logical, intelligent, reasonable, expected." Consecration to God is only to be expected after all the mercies He has bestowed upon us. We are not our own; we are bought with an inestimable price (I Corinthians 6:19-20). After we have done everything we can for God we are but unprofitable servants; we have only done our duty (Luke 17:10).

Serving God is the most reasonable thing to do in view of the benefits in this life, not to mention the eternal rewards. We must not get a martyr's complex. Although we must discipline the flesh to think and live sacrificially, from the logical, spiritual, eternal perspective living for God is the best choice we could ever make.

Verse 2. The passage moves from a passive definition of consecration to an active one. Verse 1 focuses on the gift of ourselves to God; verse 2 speaks of the activity—the life-transformation—this involves. The verse proceeds with a twofold definition of the consecrated, holy life.

First, there is a negative aspect: We must not be conformed to this world. The word translated as “conformed” means “to be fashioned after or patterned after.” The word for “world” is *aion*, which means “age,” connoting the temporal customs or patterns of worldly society. Several translations are helpful here: “Do not be conformed to this world—this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs” (*Amplified*). “Do not live according to the fashions of the times” (*Norlie*). “You must not adopt the customs of this world” (*Goodspeed*). “Do not imitate the way of this world” (*Lamsa*). “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold” (*Phillips*). Not only does this involve worldly activities and dress, it also involves worldly value systems, standards of success, modes of operation, and lifestyles. Worldliness is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:16).

Positively speaking, we are to let ourselves be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word for “transformed” is *metamorphoo*, the English derivative of which retains much the same meaning. It is the word used for Christ’s transfiguration (Mark 9:2). It appears also in II Corinthians 3:18, where Paul had the same spiritual process in mind: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” This passage does

not have in view the new birth experience alone (which the original readers already had), nor does it refer to a one-time experience of consecration. Rather it describes the process of growing in grace, being sanctified, becoming progressively more Christ-like in every way.

This transformation takes place by the renewing or remolding of our minds. This means taking on the mind of Christ, learning how to think according to spiritual principles, or evaluating life by heavenly standards. This comes by implanting the Word of God through reading, studying, meditation, and listening as well as by communing with God in prayer and worship.

With this kind of spiritual transformation and renewing we can test, approve, or discover God's will. Each one of us can know and do God's will for our lives if we will consecrate ourselves. In so doing we will find God's will to be good (for us), acceptable or pleasing (to Him), and perfect (in every way). These are not three different things or three different stages, as some suppose. We are either in God's will or not. It is true that we may miss God's will in a certain situation and still retain our salvation, but it is dangerous and wrong to assume that we can deliberately repudiate God's will for our lives and still live in an "acceptable or permissive" fringe area. We must seek to do God's will at all costs, and this verse tells us it will be at once good, acceptable, and perfect.

2. Humility in the exercise of gifts (12:3-8)

(3) For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (4) For as

we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (6) Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; (7) or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; (8) he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

At this point Romans 12 begins to discuss our individual positions in the body of Christ and our proper relationship with fellow believers.

Verse 3. Paul spoke by the grace given to him, namely, in virtue of his divine calling as an apostle (1:5; 15:15). In doing so he himself became an example of his message. His inspired message to each individual believer: we must be humble, recognizing that God is the source of everything we achieve. We must not value ourselves too highly, but we must think with sober judgment. Humility does not mean disparaging ourselves or thinking we are worse than anyone else. Rather it is realizing we are no better than anyone else and that we all need God.

We are to make this sober estimate in accordance with the faith God has given us. We have no cause for esteeming ourselves higher than others when we realize that God is the source of our faith and that God has given faith to every one of us. If this verse means God gives faith to all mankind, then it refers to the ability to believe, to potential faith, to universal prevenient grace (grace that precedes salvation and draws men to salvation). In

the present context, however, the verse probably means God has given faith to every member of the church. The kind of faith spoken of is not saving faith, but faith that enables us to live for God and to work for Him. Such faith is the product of the Holy Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22). Moreover, even though our faith may seem small, it is sufficient for every need (Matthew 17:20).

Verse 4. To illustrate this point, verse 4 uses the human body as an analogy. The human body has many parts, but not all these members have the same function. There is one body, but many members—one body, but different functions.

Verse 5 describes the church as the body of Christ, much as in I Corinthians 12:12-27. Christians are all members of the one body of Christ. Thus each one is part of the others; all are mutually dependent on one another.

Verse 6. The different members of the church have different offices and gifts, just as bodily parts have different functions. For this reason we dare not compare ourselves among ourselves (II Corinthians 10:12), but we should recognize a diversity of functions and acknowledge the value of the various members of the body. We must seek to identify our particular gifts and exercise them to the best of our ability for the benefit of the body as a whole. Instead of seeking to do every possible task in the body, we should concentrate on the particular functions God has given us and perform them well.

The Greek word for gifts here is *charismata*, the same word used of the nine spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:4-11. Neither of these lists is meant to be exhaustive, but they are rather representative of the ways God uses individuals in His church. This passage lists seven gifts.

We may also describe them as spiritual offices in the church, given by God. One person can exercise several of them. These are truly gifts from God and not attainments of man. The seven offices are:

(1) *Prophecy*—divinely inspired utterance, speaking to edify others. This does not necessarily involve prediction of the future. The word can specifically mean a supernatural public message in the language of the audience (I Corinthians 14:29-31), but here it probably has the more general meaning of anointed proclamation or preaching (I Corinthians 14:3; Revelation 19:10). If someone has this gift he should exercise it in proportion to his faith—as much as his measure of faith will enable him. Perhaps this means he should preach in agreement with the faith (the doctrine or body of belief).

Verse 7.

(2) *Ministry*—service to others, service in the church. The Greek word is *diakonia*, which specifically includes the office of a deacon.

(3) *Teaching*—instruction.

Verse 8.

(4) *Exhortation*—encouragement or comfort.

(5) *Giving*—sharing material blessings with others and with the church. The *KJV* says to do this with “simplicity.” Most commentators understand the underlying Greek word to mean “liberality, generosity,” but it also can mean “singleness of heart, sincere concern.”

(6) *Leading or ruling*—leadership role in the church. (Another possible meaning of the Greek word here is “to give aid.”) Leaders are to exercise their role with diligence, carefulness, earnestness. God has ordained rulers or leaders in His church. It is important

to submit to human authority in the church (Hebrews 13:17), as long as human leaders exercise their authority under God according to the guidelines of His Word. These leaders are not to be dictators but are to be examples and servants to all (Mark 10:42-45; I Peter 5:1-3). Even leaders are subject to the principle of authority. They must submit to higher leaders, and the highest leaders must submit to one another and to the collective body. (See Acts 11:1-4; 15:29; 21:18-26; Galatians 2:1-14.)

(7) *Showing mercy*—being merciful and kind to others. This includes visiting the sick, helping the poor, assisting widows and orphans (Matthew 25:31-46; Galatians 2:10; James 1:27; 2:15-17). The person who exercises this office should do it cheerfully, not in a begrudging, mournful, or patronizing way.

To summarize, each Christian has a particular gift, office, or function in the church (or possibly several of them). Whatever God has given him to do he should exercise it to his full capacity, but always with humility.

3. Principles of love (12:9-21)

(9) Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. (10) Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; (11) not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (12) rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; (13) distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. (14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (15) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (16) Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but

associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. (17) Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. (18) If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (20) "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The last portion of chapter 12 presents a number of practical maxims relating to Christian conduct, particularly to interpersonal relationships. While some may see this as a collection of miscellaneous proverbs, it is better to view it as an exposition of love. Beginning with its mention in verse 9, love seems to be the dominant thought. From this perspective, the passage is similar to I Corinthians 13, and the two passages emphasize many of the same points.

Romans 12:9-21 is not merely a collection of rules, then, but an explanation of love. Love will affect the entire range of our religious and social life. For purposes of study we can identify 23 principles of love here, phrased as commands.

Verse 9. (1) Manifest love (*agape*) unfeigned, undisguised, without deceit, with sincerity. (2) Hate evil things. This is part of divine love: "You who love the LORD, hate evil!" (Psalm 97:10). (3) Clasp, cling to, hold on tightly to good things.

Verse 10. (4) Be tenderly affectionate to fellow Christians in brotherly love (*philadelphia*). (5) Honor one

another above yourselves. Show respect and honor for each other rather than seeking honor for yourselves. "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

Verse 11. (6) Do not be lazy in what you do—be diligent. The *KJV* uses the word *business*, not in the sense of an economic venture but in the original sense of "busyness." (7) Be zealous, be on fire in spirit. The Greek word literally means "boiling." (8) Serve the Lord. Be His bondslave in all these things.

Verse 12. (9) In your hope be joyful. (10) Be patient in trials and afflictions. (These two points are reminiscent of 5:1-5.) (11) Be faithful and persistent in prayer. Maintain the habit of prayer and always be ready to pray.

Verse 13. (12) Contribute to needy saints. As in 1:7 and throughout the New Testament, the word *saints* refers to all born again persons. (13) Make a practice of hospitality. The Greek verb literally means "to pursue" hospitality. The Greek noun for hospitality is literally stranger-loving" (*philoxenia*).

Verse 14. (14) Pray for blessings upon your persecutors; do not curse them. To curse means "to call down judgment upon, to invoke evil upon, to denounce violently." This verse is no doubt based on Christ's words: "Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:28).

Verse 15. (15) Share in the joy or sorrow of others. Show genuine interest, concern, and compassion. More than showing sympathy, develop the capacity for empathy—participating in the feelings and thoughts of others.

Verse 16. (16) Live in harmony with one another; be

of one accord. (17) Do not be haughty or too ambitious and do not be overly impressed by great and powerful things, but rather associate with people of low position. This last clause could be applied to things instead of people, meaning to accommodate to humble ways or, as an *NIV* footnote says, “willing to do menial work.” The *KJV* uses the word *condescend*, but in modern usage that word connotes a patronizing, superior attitude, which is emphatically not what this verse teaches. (18) Do not be wise in your own eyes. Do not be vain or conceited. This is apparently a quotation of Proverbs 3:7a. Paul used the same language in Romans 11:25.

Verse 17. (19) Do not repay any man evil for evil. This follows Christ’s teachings not to resist evil, to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and so on (Matthew 5:38-48). (20) Always be careful to do what is good and right in the sight of everyone. “See that your public behavior is above criticism” (*Phillips*). This is a reference to Proverbs 3:4, particularly in the Septuagint. Not only should our honesty be known to God, it should be evident to all men (II Corinthians 8:21). Our lives, including business and church dealings, should be transparently honest. We should avoid even the appearance of evil or impropriety (I Thessalonians 5:22).

Verse 18. (21) If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. By saying “if it is possible,” Paul recognized that we cannot control the thoughts or actions of others. For two parties to be at peace, both must have the proper attitude. We cannot dictate the attitudes of others, but for our part we can refuse to retaliate, react violently, hold grudges, or be unfriendly.

Verse 19. (22) Do not take revenge. Instead, let wrath take its course without your participation. Some interpret this to mean we should let the other party vent his rage. More probably it means to let God's wrath (divine judgment) take its course. In other words, we should not take matters in our own hands, but turn them over to God and let Him impose any judgment He deems necessary. This meaning is apparent from Paul's supporting scriptural quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35, in which God promises to punish all evil Himself and asserts His exclusive prerogative to do so. This does not mean we should actively desire God's vengeance to satisfy our personal feelings, but our attitude should be: If any vengeance is due, let God send it and not us.

Verse 20. In further support of this, verse 20 quotes Proverbs 25:21-22, which teaches us to give food and drink to enemies in need. In doing so, we will heap coals of fire upon their heads. This last statement is obscure and has been the source of much speculation. Some interpret the coals as a symbol of damnation, as in Psalm 140:10. By assisting our enemy, then, we increase his guilt and therefore his punishment. To view this as advice on a permissible way to inflict greater punishment on one's enemy, however, violates the teaching of these verses. Identifying the coals with punishment has some merit if we do not see this verse as referring to our motives but only to the result of our enemy's action. In other words, we genuinely help our enemy out of noble motives, but in the end God will punish the enemy for refusing our overtures of friendship.

Some have ingeniously proposed that this verse refers to the eastern practice of carrying things on one's head.

If someone's fire went out, a friend or neighbor would give him coals to relight his fire, heaping them in a pan on his head. In this case, the verse says that feeding one's enemy is like giving him coals for his fire.

Probably the best interpretation is to see coals as symbolic of shame. By assisting one's enemy, we will provoke him to a sense of shame. His face will become hot and red as if coals were poured on his head. This may lead him to repentance and reconciliation, whereas if we had repaid evil for evil he would have remained a bitter enemy. In making this connection some commentators have pointed to an ancient Egyptian custom of expressing penitence by publicly carrying a pan of coals on the head.

Regardless of the precise significance of the coals, the passage clearly teaches us not to desire or seek revenge. The only "retaliation" or "vengeance" we are allowed is to do good to our enemy out of a sincere desire to help him and to become his friend.

Verse 21. (23) Do not let evil overcome you, but overcome evil with good. This final admonition summarizes well the specific teachings of verses 17-20, but it also serves as a fitting conclusion to the entire passage. In the final analysis, Christian living means to conquer evil with good. Through divine love, we can defeat and overwhelm the forces of evil with the superior forces of truth and righteousness.

B. Conduct as Citizens of the State (13:1-10)

Christians not only have a duty to submit to God and to fellow Christians, but they also have a responsibility to submit to civil government. Moreover, they owe a debt of love not just to their fellow believers but also to their

neighbors, their fellow citizens, and indeed all mankind.

1. Duty to civil government (13:1-7)

(1) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. (2) Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (3) For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. (4) For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (5) Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. (6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. (7) Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

This passage discusses the Christian's duty to submit to civil government. Church government is not the subject, although many of the same principles apply in both areas. The teaching here is actually an expanded version of Christ's words, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21). Similar teachings can be found in Titus 3:1 and in I Peter 2:13-17 and 4:15.

Verse 1. Everyone should submit to the "governing authorities" or "higher powers" (KJV). From the context

it is clear that these are human rulers. We must submit to them because God is the source of all authority and He has established existing rulers. This does not mean God chooses, appoints, or approves every individual leader (although no one can exercise power unless God allows it). Rather, God has established the general principle of human government. He desires the orderly government of human society, and He delegates authority to man to accomplish this. Of course, the state has divine authority only to fulfill its proper purpose in God's plan, not for everything it might try to do.

Verse 2. Consequently, those who resist human government are actually resisting God. This will result in their judgment. The *KJV* uses the word *damnation*, but originally that English word simply meant "judgment" without necessarily referring to eternal punishment. This is the meaning of the underlying Greek word. The judgment spoken of probably refers to punishment inflicted by the government, acting as God's agent, as in verse 4. Of course, the unrepentant rebel will ultimately receive judgment directly from God as well.

Verse 3. The function of government in God's scheme of things is to keep order, to control evil. Thus government brings terror only to evildoers. If we obey the civil law and do what is good, we need not fear government but can in fact expect its praise.

Verse 4. The ruler is God's minister—*diakonos* in Greek, meaning "servant or helper." God uses him to motivate people to do good. Evildoers should fear him, for God has allowed him to "bear the sword" for a purpose. That is, God also uses the ruler to execute judgment on evildoers. The reference to the sword means the

government can use physical force to maintain order and to restrain evil. It may also imply the existence of capital punishment.

The civil ruler is not necessarily God's servant in every respect, but only insofar as he helps to keep order in society and to punish lawbreakers. Regardless of his personal life, he is God's servant in one sense because he is an instrument to perform one aspect of God's will in society. This does not imply any special status in the church for civil officials, even if they are Christians. The state and the church are two distinct, separate spheres of service.

Verse 5. There are two reasons, then, for Christians to submit to the civil government: (1) to avoid wrath, that is, to avoid civil punishment; (2) to keep a clear conscience before God, since human government is God's plan.

Verse 6. Submission to the government includes payment of taxes. Jesus Himself paid taxes and taught His followers to do likewise (Matthew 17:24-27; 22:17-21). Christians should pay taxes because taxes support the civil officials who work full-time to accomplish God's purpose. These civil officials are God's ministers—*leitourgos* in Greek, meaning "public, administrative, or religious servant."

Verse 7. Christians should discharge all their earthly obligations. Paul gave four examples: (1) Tribute or taxes—direct taxes levied by the government. The term includes tribute exacted by a foreign power, such as the Roman Empire's demands on Israel. (2) Customs—indirect taxes, duties, tolls, or other types of revenue for support of the government. (3) Fear—respect, awe. (4) Honor. Christians owe respect and honor to governmental

leaders for their service in God's cause. Spiritual leaders are to be honored even more (I Timothy 5:17).

The preceding discussion does not depend on a particular form of government, nor does it recommend one. (Of course, it does exclude anarchy.) Moreover, it is not invalidated by the evil character of individual officials. The government of Paul's day was the Roman Empire—a dictatorship headed by the Emperor Nero. In many ways it fell short of God's ideal for human government and it allowed many ungodly, unchristian practices. Nevertheless, it generally upheld law and order. Its system of justice was imperfect, but it did punish murderers, thieves, and other criminals who victimized people. Clearly, then, Christians should be submissive to government even when the form of government is faulty or when individual rulers are inadequate or evil. Nothing in this passage, however, precludes Christians from seeking by peaceful means to change officials, ruling parties, or even the form of government.

This teaching does assume that the state is performing its God-given functions and is not overstepping its divinely appointed bounds of authority. There is no discussion of what Christians should do if the state fails in its duty. Of course, if there is a direct conflict between God's laws and man's laws, Christians must always obey the former (Acts 5:29). The Bible never condones violent rebellion against government, however (Matthew 26:52). Even though the Roman Empire was a repressive foreign dictatorship for the Jews, Jesus and Romans taught peaceful submission and cooperation. If conscience compels Christians to disobey civil law, they should submit peaceably to the civil penalty.

Romans 13:1-7 teaches Christians to be law-abiding citizens. Does this mean that every violation of a civil ordinance is a sin in God's sight? God's law, not man's defines sin and morality. Something may be legal yet immoral, while something else may be illegal but not inherently immoral. If breaking the civil law involves cheating, lying, theft, or any other violation of God's moral law, then certainly it is sinful. On the other hand, the violation of a minor, nonmoral, noncriminal regulation—such as a traffic ordinance—is not necessarily sinful in itself. Under ordinary circumstances we would expect the Christian to abide by these regulations as well. If a Christian does violate such a regulation, he must submit to any civil penalties that result. For example, if he receives a speeding ticket, in the eyes of society he could fulfill his duty to be a law-abiding citizen by paying his fine, and he should do so.

2. Duty to fellow citizens (13:8-10)

(8) Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Verse 8 carries over the thought of indebtedness from the preceding section. The same Greek root word is used as a noun meaning "due" in verse 7 and as a verb mean-

ing “owe” in verse 8. Verse 7 admonishes Christians to pay all debts to the state, while verse 8 exhorts them not to leave unpaid any debt owed to anyone.

Some have interpreted the statement, “Owe no one anything,” to mean all loans are forbidden. It does not appear to be an absolute prohibition on loans, however, for the Old Testament established laws to regulate loans (Deuteronomy 15:1-3; 24:10-13), Jesus told a parable that commended the earning of interest on loans (Matthew 25:27), and Jesus taught Christians to lend readily to the needy (Matthew 5:42; Luke 6:35). Surely the Lord would not encourage Christians to lend if it is sinful to borrow.

It appears, that the statement means, “Pay every just debt. Do not incur any debt you cannot pay and pay on time.” This understanding fits the context best. Just as we are to pay taxes and other just debts to the government, so we are to pay on time all obligations to everyone else. Thus the *NIV* translates, “Let no debt remain outstanding.” An installment loan does not violate this passage because the payments are not legally due until the time agreed upon in the contract. We should note that a bankruptcy may release one from the legal obligation but not the moral obligation to repay a debt.

The only outstanding debt that Christians should have is love. The Greek uses the present infinitive “to love,” which indicates continuous or repeated action. The *NIV* says we have “the continuing debt to love one another.” In other words, when we pay all our debts we still owe one more that we will never fully discharge: love. We owe this debt to every man, not just to fellow Christians.

When we love we fulfill the law. The Greek uses the present participle, “loving,” which indicates continuous

action. In the process of loving others, we fulfill the law. Verse 10 restates this truth.

Verse 9. To illustrate, verse 9 quotes several of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:13-17 and Deuteronomy 5:17-21. These commandments forbid adultery, murder, theft, false witness, and covetousness—all of which are wrongs against other people. (The critical text omits the commandment about false witness.) If we truly love others, we certainly will not commit these sins against them. Thus we can summarize all these commandments, and in fact all other commandments of the law that deal with interpersonal relationships, in the statement of Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul also quoted this verse in Galatians 5:14: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The same quotation appears in James 2:8, where James called it “the royal law.”

This passage does not mention those commandments that concern our direct relationship with God, for it deals only with our debts to our fellow man. We can summarize those other commandments by Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” As Jesus taught, on the twin principles of loving God and loving our fellow man rest all the ethical teachings of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34). We also learn from Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbor is not just a friend, a kinsman, or one who lives nearby. Rather, our neighbor is anyone who is in need, even if he is a stranger from another racial or social group (Luke 10:25-37). Our neighbor is our fellow man.

Verse 10 summarizes the passage. The commandments quoted in verse 9 all prohibit harm to others. If we love our fellow men we will not harm them. Therefore through love we fulfill the law.

C. Our Great Incentive and Hope (13:11-14)

(11) And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. (12) The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. (13) Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. (14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

This portion of chapter 13 describes the hope that motivates us to implement the teachings of chapters 12-13. That great incentive and hope is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. As chapter 12 opens with a call to personal consecration, so chapter 13 closes with a call to personal holiness.

Verse 11 admonishes the readers to know the time or to discern the season. It was already time to awake—time to be ready, watchful, and responsible—for the day of salvation was drawing closer. The Bible sometimes speaks of salvation as past, sometimes as present, and sometimes as future. Here it is spoken of as future, clearly distinguishing it from the one-time, past-tense experience of belief. (The latter is expressed by the Greek aorist tense, which indicates a simple past act.) The past act of belief corresponds with the time of conversion, justification,

and regeneration. The future time of salvation refers to our ultimate deliverance from all the power and effects of sin, including the glorification of our physical bodies, which will occur at the coming of Christ for His church. (See Romans 8:23-25; Philippians 3:20-21.)

Verse 12. The dawn of Christ's appearance is at hand. While we often compare Christ's coming to midnight, verse 12 uses the analogy of dawn, which is more appropriate from the believer's perspective. The night of waiting is almost over; the day is almost ready to break. No human being can know when Christ will come again (Matthew 24:36), but Paul was looking for Christ's return in his day. Paul was not wrong to look for His return, for the Lord wants His church in every age to be ready and waiting for His coming (Matthew 24:44). When Paul wrote, "The day is at hand," God was encouraging believers to be always expecting the Lord to come. If Christ's coming was at hand almost 2000 years ago, how much more is it so today!

In view of the approaching dawn, what should our response be? First, we should cast off the works of darkness—that is, sinful works. Next, we should put on the armor of light—that is, the armor of righteousness. The image is of a soldier who is preparing for a new day. The analogy of armor is extended in Ephesians 6:11-18.

Verse 13. Third, we should walk properly, as in the day, avoiding sinful activities. In other words, we should live and act honestly, becomingly, and decently. We should act as if we are living in the day, with all our deeds exposed to everyone. (See 12:17.) We should avoid the sinful "night" activities. The contrast between day and night is reminiscent of Christ's words regarding light and dark-

ness: "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

The verse lists six evil activities to avoid, arranged in three pairs of closely related sins.

(1) Revelry (*KJV*, rioting)—carousing; wild parties; orgies (*NIV*).

(2) Drunkenness—intoxication; drinking bouts (*Rotherham*).

(3) Licentiousness (*KJV*, chambering)—literally, "in beds," referring to fornication; sexual immorality.

(4) Lewdness (*KJV*, wantonness)—excess; absence of restraint; indecency; debauchery. It carries a sexual connotation here because of its connection with the preceding word.

(5) Strife—quarreling; dissension; contention; discord.

(6) Envy—resentment of another's advantage together with a coveting of it; jealousy.

Verse 14. Instead of indulging in these sinful activities, we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Literally, we are to clothe ourselves with or in Christ. We are to become Christ-like in every way. This is similar to exhortations in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:12.

We must not give any opportunities to the flesh (the sinful nature) to gratify its lusts. We must not participate in anything that would arouse its hidden desires. The Greek uses a word that literally means "provision, plans, foresight, or forethought." Instead of letting our sinful

nature plan ways to satisfy its sinful desires, we must actively resist the dominion of sinful lusts (6:12) and kill the deeds of flesh (8:13).

D. Questions of Conscience (14:1-15:13)

The concluding portion of the practical teachings of Romans deals with questions of conscience. Some things are clearly right while others are clearly wrong, but there are some issues on which consciences differ. This section gives guidelines for handling these questions without violating individual consciences and yet without destroying the unity of the church.

It is very important to note that these guidelines relate only to nonmoral, or morally indifferent, issues. No violation of biblical commands or basic biblical principles is at stake. Therefore, in such a matter two Christians can arrive at opposite decisions for their personal lives and still have fellowship with one another as believers.

1. We must not judge others (14:1-12)

(1) Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. (2) For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. (3) Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. (4) Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. (5) One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who

does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. (7) For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. (8) For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (9) For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (10) But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (12) So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

In dealing with matters of opinion, Romans enunciates the principle of Christian liberty. In areas of personal—as opposed to scriptural—convictions, we have the freedom to act as we will. Therefore, we must not judge one another.

Verse 1. We are to accept those whose faith is weak, without arguing with them or passing judgment on them in debatable areas. We are to avoid controversies over personal opinions. "Faith" here is Christian knowledge, persuasion, or conviction, not saving faith or persevering faith. As verse 2 indicates, the weak brother is not defective in character or spirituality, but he lacks maturity and understanding. He has an inferior standard of judgment.

Verse 2. As an example of a question of conscience, verse 2 cites the controversy over eating meat. Certain

Christians refused to eat meat because of conscientious scruples. This could have been for one of three reasons: (1) religious belief in vegetarianism, (2) fear of eating meat that could have been offered to idols (I Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:19-33), or (3) fear of eating meat classified as unclean or prepared in an unclean fashion under Jewish law (as in Daniel 1:8, 12).

The weak brother is described as the one who abstains. The weak brother does not have full understanding of his Christian liberty; he has an inferior standard of judgment for his actions. Romans does not thereby denigrate the weak brother, for that is precisely what it teaches not to do. Indeed, it tells the abstainer to be true to his genuinely held convictions in order to avoid the possibility of sin (verse 23).

It is important to limit the teaching on Christian liberty to the context. The type of controversy discussed is not a question of morality, of obeying a scriptural command, or of implementing an important scriptural principle. Rather, the passage deals with a ceremonial issue—an issue without moral significance. The other major example—observance of special days (verse 5)—is of a similar nature. In fact, in both cases the New Testament expressly allows the questioned conduct (Mark 7:19; Acts 15:19-29; Colossians 2:16-17). The teaching of 14:1-15:13, then, applies only when the Bible allows the conduct or at most when the Bible is silent on the subject. If the Word of God addresses an issue, either specifically or in principle, then Christians do not have “liberty” to disobey.

Verse 3. The admonition to the one who participates in the questioned conduct is: The participator should not despise or look down upon the abstainer. Even though the

participator has superior insight, he must be considerate of the views of the abstainer. The admonition to the one who abstains is: The abstainer should not judge or condemn the participator. There are several reasons for this teaching. First, God has accepted both parties, so they can do no less to each other.

Verse 4. Second, both are servants who belong to God and not to each other. God is the master of everyone. Since no Christian is the master of another, no individual Christian has the right to judge another. Each person is responsible to please God, not man. Third, God will give power to both participator and abstainer to enable them to persevere and to render satisfactory service to Him. (See verse 10 for additional reasons.)

The critical text says “the Lord” (instead of “God”) will enable them to stand. This does not change the point.

Verse 5. The second example of the type of controversy under consideration is the observance of special days. This involved the designation of certain days as sabbaths or holy days, probably under the influence of the Jewish law. Again, this is a ceremonial, nonmoral matter in which the Bible actually grants liberty (Acts 15:19-29; Colossians 2:16-17).

Some consider a certain day to be more sacred than another, while others treat every day alike. There is room for both practices in the church. This clearly excludes any insistence upon particular religious rules for a certain day, whether it be Saturday as the Jewish Sabbath or Sunday as a replacement of the Jewish Sabbath. For Christians, every day is a day of spiritual rest and refreshing through the Holy Spirit. Every day is sacred and appropriate for worship. Of course, Christians should be faithful in attending

local church services (Hebrews 10:25) and early Christians met on Sunday in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2), but there are no legalistic requirements as to certain days.

On these nonmoral matters, each person should be fully convinced in his own mind. He should develop personal convictions to guide his actions. He should have assurance that what he does is right. The Bible does not advocate ignorance or indifference, but thoughtful consideration and firm conclusions.

Verse 6. Regardless of what one decides about these issues, he should dedicate his conduct to the Lord. If he does so, the Lord will accept his action. If he chooses to observe a special day, he does it to honor the Lord and not out of legalistic or paganistic motivations. (The critical text omits "and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.") If he eats meat, he gives God thanks for it and thereby honors Him. (Apparently, this refers to the practice of offering a prayer of thanksgiving before meals.) If he abstains or fasts, he does so to honor the Lord and he still gives God thanks.

Verse 7. No Christian lives or dies in isolation; our lives are bound up with Christ's life. Everything we do affects people's view of Christ. In everything we do we should glorify Him. From this truth we can derive a related principle, although not the contextual meaning of this verse: our lives affect others, particularly other Christians.

Verse 8. No matter what we do—whether we live or die—we are the Lord's. By implication, then, whatever course of action we choose in nonmoral matters we can and should devote it to the Lord.

Verse 9. In fact, Christ died and rose again that He might be our Lord in both life and death. (The critical text omits “and rose.”)

Verse 10. In view of Christ’s lordship over all of us in all situations, including both life and death, how can we presume to criticize or show contempt for each other? Here the point is reiterated: We must not judge others. In addition to the three reasons given in verses 2-3, we must not be judgmental because God will be the judge of each one of us. All of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The critical text says “the judgment seat of God,” but “the judgment seat of Christ” fits the context better. In the early second century both Polycarp and Marcion quoted this latter wording. In any case, “the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). God will judge us from the position of One who has led an earthly life, conquered sin in the flesh, and offered salvation to us through the sacrifice of His human life. “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (II Corinthians 5:10).

Verse 11. As proof of the reality of judgment for all, verse 11 quotes Isaiah 45:23, which says every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to Jehovah (the LORD). Assuming verse 10 does refer to the judgment seat of Christ, then applying this prophecy about Jehovah to Christ is a strong affirmation of Christ’s deity. It establishes that Jesus Christ is Jehovah—the one God of the Old Testament. Philippians 2:10-11 also specifically applies this statement in Isaiah to Jesus Christ.

Verse 12. Each one of us shall give an individual account of himself to God. This restates the reason given in

verse 10 for not judging one another.

From the entire passage we can extract three principles to guide our conduct in nonmoral matters: (1) Each of us should have our own personal convictions. (2) Each of us should follow our own conscience in these matters. (3) In all things we must acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ.

His lordship will enable us to tolerate differences of opinion within the body of Christ (but not disobedience to God's Word). Moreover, this gives us a guide in answering the practical questions of daily Christian living. In deciding whether to participate in a certain activity, we should ask, "Can I do this unto the Lord—giving Him thanks, glorifying Him, and acknowledging His lordship while I am doing it?" As Colossians 3:17 states, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

2. We must not tempt others (14:13-23)

(13) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. (14) I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (15) Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. (16) Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; (17) for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (18) For he who serves Christ in these things

is acceptable to God and approved by men. (19) Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (20) Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. (21) It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. (22) Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. (23) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

The second guideline relative to questions of conscience is just as important as the first: we must not tempt others. We must not use our Christian liberty in a way that would destroy the faith of the weaker brother. We must not cause him to stumble or fall in his Christian walk. In matters of opinion, even though we have liberty, we must still apply the principle of love.

Verse 13 restates the main point of the preceding verses: we must not judge one another. Then it proceeds to state a new point: we should take care not to put a stumbling block or an obstacle in our brother's path. We should not let our attitudes or actions hinder someone else's spiritual life. (See Luke 17:1-2.) The same Greek word meaning "to judge" appears in both clauses of Romans 14:13. In other words, if we want to do any judging, rather than judging others we should judge ourselves!

The verse uses two Greek words to describe what we should not cause. The first means a stumbling block, an obstacle, a hindrance, or an occasion to take offense. The

other means a trap or a temptation to sin. We are not to do anything that might cause someone else to stumble in his spiritual walk or to fall into sin.

Verse 14. Nothing is unclean in itself. We must limit this statement to the context; it clearly relates to food (verse 15). Thus the *NIV* translates, "No food is unclean in itself." Paul certainly recognized that many activities could be spiritually unclean and sinful (II Corinthians 6:17). In themselves physical things such as food are morally neutral, but they can become unclean to us because of what they represent to our conscience. This does not mean all physical things are good to use for all purposes. For example, it is not beneficial nor is it God's will for us to drink hemlock, bathe in poison ivy, or smoke opium.

Paul was persuaded by the Lord Jesus Himself that foods were morally neutral. Perhaps his certainty came by direct revelation from Christ and the leading of His Spirit, but probably he also had access to the specific teaching of Christ on this subject, which is now recorded in Mark 7:14-23. Christ plainly taught that food going into a man could not defile him, but things proceeding from man's heart could.

Verse 15. Although food is not intrinsically sinful, it can disturb the conscience of another. (The *KJV* word *meat* is an archaic English usage which, like the underlying Greek word, simply means "food.") If a brother has a conscientious objection to eating a certain type of food, we should not partake of it in his presence. For example, if a brother thinks eating pork is sinful (though it is not), we should not eat it in front of him. If we do, we may encourage him to do something he thinks is wrong—

thereby causing him to act contrary to his faith, to feel guilty, and possibly even to abandon his Christian walk altogether. Alternatively, even if he does not participate, he may lose confidence in our Christian example and may also lose faith in God.

If we seriously injure our brother by what we eat, then we are not walking in love. We must not let our liberty ruin another. We must not destroy a brother's faith by indulging in a relatively minor thing such as eating a certain kind of food, even though it is morally allowable for us. Christ paid the ultimate price—His life—to save our brother; we must not destroy him for the sake of temporal pleasure. We must not insist on our Christian liberty to the point that it becomes an instrument of devastation to the weaker brother.

We should be so secure in our position in Christ and so unconcerned about personal ego that we can compromise on nonessentials for the sake of our brothers. If we are always fighting for our "rights," we can actually become bound by our liberty! F. F. Bruce described the Apostle Paul well in this regard: "So completely emancipated was he from spiritual bondage that he was not even in bondage to his emancipation. He conformed to the Jewish way of life when he was in Jewish society as cheerfully as he accommodated himself to Gentile ways when he was living with Gentiles."¹ This explains why on one occasion he submitted to a Jewish vow involving Jewish ceremonial law (Acts 21:18-26). He knew this did not earn any favor with God, but for the sake of Jewish believers he was willing to affirm Jewish culture.

Verse 16. The Greek text literally says, "Let not your good be blasphemed." We should not let something that

is allowable for us become a harmful thing to someone else. “Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil” (*NIV*). “Do not give occasion for others to criticize that which is justifiable for you” (*Amplified*).

Verse 17. We must not be insistent on our liberty to eat and drink, for, after all, the essence of Christianity is not in natural things but in spiritual things. The kingdom of God is righteousness (moral uprightness), joy (gladness, delight), and peace (inner tranquility) in the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts and lives of men. Although Christ will establish a literal, earthly kingdom in the future, this verse speaks of the present kingdom of God within us (Luke 17:21). We can only enter this kingdom by the new birth—the birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). Since the present kingdom of God consists of righteousness, joy, and peace imparted by the Holy Spirit, it is clear that we can only partake of that kingdom through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. True Christianity stems from an internal relationship with God.

Verse 18. The way to serve God is not in food and drink, but by bearing spiritual fruit produced by the Spirit’s rule in our hearts. In bearing this fruit we obtain both God’s acceptance and man’s approval. (The critical text has “this” instead of “these things.”)

Verse 19. Verses 19-21 summarize the proper course of action in questions of conscience. We are to follow after—literally, “pursue”—peace in all things. We must actively seek peace; we must truly be peacemakers. We must seek to edify one another—to build each other up, to be of mutual benefit and encouragement.

Verse 20 reiterates the thought of verses 14-16. We must not destroy God's work for the sake of a petty indulgence. Literally, we must not "overthrow" the work of God, which would be the opposite of building it up. Truly, all food is pure, but if we eat something in a way that causes someone else to stumble, then we do wrong. Something allowable in itself may be sinful if it leads others astray. We may tempt others to sin when we think it is innocent.

Again we must limit the phrase, "All things indeed are pure," to the context—that is, to nonmoral issues, specifically food. Thus the *NIV* says, "All food is clean." Also, when the verse warns us not to cause "offense," it does not refer to anything that displeases or upsets someone but rather to things that cause others to stumble in their Christian walk. Of course, we should avoid upsetting or displeasing others as far as possible, but we need not live in fear and bondage because of the personal "pet peeves" of others. Christians who consider themselves mature cannot threaten to "take offense" in order to demand universal conformity to their own personal convictions. The whole point of this passage is that Christians should *not* force their personal convictions on others. If one's exercise of liberty could actually harm a sincere Christian's spiritual walk, however, then one should avoid the action.

Verse 21. It is good to deny ourselves of certain personal pleasures if this will prevent spiritual harm to others. (The critical text omits "or is offended or is made weak.") This is a sufficient reason for abstinence from questionable things. This is why we must abstain even from the appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). Verse 21 uses

two examples: eating flesh (meat) and drinking wine (grape juice, whether fermented or unfermented). Perhaps this speaks in general terms, citing one example each of food and drink, or perhaps it alludes to actual controversies. Eating meat could be questioned on grounds of vegetarianism, meat offered to idols, or meat unclean under Jewish law. Drinking grape juice could be questioned as being unclean under Jewish law (Daniel 1:8) or forbidden by a Nazarite vow (temporary or permanent) (Numbers 6:3). Apparently, all the controversies in this chapter—food, special days, drink—were related to Jewish ceremonial laws or similar customs among pagans.

There is no reason to suppose Paul endorsed the use of alcoholic beverages, which involves moral issues. In any case we *should* abstain from alcoholic beverages, because they *do* pose a stumbling block to others. (For a discussion of why Christians should not partake of alcoholic beverages, see Chapter 10 of *Practical Holiness: A Second Look* by David K. Bernard.)

Verse 22 presents the conclusion to the one who participates: If you have faith (i.e., conviction) in your liberty, keep it to yourself. (The critical text has for the first sentence: “The faith which you have—have.”) Exercise it privately before God, but do not shock a brother by it. Be sure, however, that you actually have a clear conscience in this matter. Happy are those who have no misgivings about what they practice, who do not condemn themselves for what they allow.

Verse 23 presents the conclusion to the one who abstains: If you have any doubt about a practice, do not participate. If someone doubts but participates anyway he is condemned. The *KJV* uses the word *damned*, but the

primary meaning of the word in Greek and in *KJV* English is “condemned.” This could mean that the one who acts despite his doubts is condemned in his own mind and feels guilty. The last clause specifically states, however, that any violation of the faith principle is sin. This does not mean all non-Christian works are sinful, but it does mean we may sin in doing what others regard as innocent. If we believe something is sinful but deliberately do it anyway, then we manifest a willingness to disobey and rebel against God. This attitude is sinful even if the act is neutral in itself.

3. We must follow the example of Christ (15:1-13)

(1) We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (2) Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. (3) For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” (4) For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (5) Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, (6) that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (7) Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. (8) Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, (9) and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to

Your name.” (10) And again he says: “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!” (11) And again: “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” (12) And again, Isaiah says: “There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.” (13) Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The discussion of questions of conscience concludes with an exhortation to follow Christ's example of loving others. This emphasizes the need to form a united Christian brotherhood.

Verse 1 summarizes the theme of the preceding chapter: The strong Christian (the one with mature understanding of Christian liberty) should be considerate of the weak Christian (the one who has a conscientious scruple against a certain allowable, nonmoral practice). The word *then* ties the beginning of chapter 15 closely with the thought of the preceding chapter. The word *ought* comes from the same Greek word translated as “owe” in 13:8. Mature Christians have a moral obligation to bear with or put up with the doubts of the weak. We should not live to please ourselves.

Verse 2. We should live to please our fellow believer, seeking what is good for him and seeking to build him up. This does not mean currying favor, but sincerely acting in his best spiritual interests. (Verses 5-7 further discuss our mutual obligations.)

Verse 3. Christ is our supreme example in this regard. He did not seek to please Himself, but He willingly bore reproaches, abuses, or insults because of His faithfulness

in doing the will of God. The quotation is from Psalm 69:9.

Verse 4. After quoting this Old Testament passage, verse 4 reminds the reader of the purpose of the Scriptures, which for the original audience was the Old Testament. The Scriptures were written to instruct us, particularly to give us patience (endurance, steadfastness) and comfort (encouragement). These in turn will produce hope. Romans 5:4 has already shown how perseverance in trials produces hope. It is active endurance not passive resignation that is contemplated. By studying examples of godly men in Scripture, we learn to have patience in trials, comfort in knowing God will help us, and hope of salvation.

Verse 5. Verses 5-7 return to Christian brotherhood and our obligations to one another, which verses 1-2 begin to describe. Paul prayed that God would give his readers grace to be united in mind. God is described as the source of patience and comfort, which, as verse 4 points out, we can receive through the Word of God. (The *KJV* uses the word *consolation*, but the Greek word is the same in verses 4 and 5.) We are to have a spirit of unity “according to Christ Jesus”—according to the example of Christ, in accordance with the will of Christ, or inasmuch as we all follow Christ.

Verse 6. As a result of our oneness, we can unite in giving vocal praise and glory to God. Here God is called “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This phrase does not detract from the deity of Jesus or the oneness of God. Rather, it describes the unique covenant relationship of the man Christ to the Father. It is similar to the Old Testament phrase, “the God of Abraham.” It reminds us of the inheritance Christ earned as a sinless

man, which we have through faith in Christ. Just as the descendants of Abraham received special promises from the God of Abraham, so those who believe on Jesus Christ and identify with Him receive special promises from the God of Jesus Christ. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5). As a man, Christ is the new head of the human race (Romans 5:14-15; 8:29).

Verse 7. In short, we must accept and fellowship one another, just as Christ has accepted us. (The critical text has "you" instead of "us.") As in verse 3, we are pointed to the example of Christ. If Christ has accepted someone, surely we should too. By accepting one another in united fellowship we will bring praise and glory to God—the desire expressed in verse 6—in actions as well as words.

Verse 8. Verses 8-12 use Christ as the supreme example of acceptance of others and reconciliation of differences. Jesus came to serve. As the Jewish Messiah He first came to serve the Jews, to fulfill God's promises to their ancestors. (The critical text says "Christ" instead of "Jesus Christ.")

Verse 9. At the same time, it was God's purpose all along to include the Gentiles in His New Testament church and to receive praise from them. In other words, Jesus came for the Gentiles just as much as for the Jews.

To support the assertion that Jesus came to the Gentiles, verse 9 quotes Psalm 18:49, which is also recorded in II Samuel 22:50. David spoke of praising God among the Gentiles, indicating that all along God wanted the Gentiles to know and praise Him.

Verse 10 quotes from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:43, which exhorts the Gentiles to praise God.

Verse 11. Another quotation, from Psalm 117:1, exhorts all the Gentiles and all peoples (plural) to praise Jehovah.

Verse 12. Finally, Isaiah 11:10 specifically describes the mission of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. The “root of Jesse” is the Messiah, who would come from the line of David and Jesse (David’s father). Isaiah 11:1 says, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Revelation 5:5 similarly describes Jesus as the “Root of David.” As God, Jesus was David’s Lord and Creator, but as man He was David’s descendant. The Messiah would rule over the Gentiles and they would hope in Him. The quotation is from the Septuagint.

The lesson we learn from verses 8-12 is that Jesus received everyone and served everyone without discrimination. He bridged the greatest human division of all—the gap between Jew and Gentile—by uniting both together in one church. By implication, we should be willing and able to overcome any differences in the church, including those over questions of conscience. If we follow Christ’s example, we will accept all true Christians into our hearts and into our fellowship.

Verse 13 concludes the body of the epistle with a prayer addressed to the God of hope. Paul prayed that God would fill his readers with all joy and peace, which are of the essence of the kingdom of God (14:17). They would receive this through believing. Moreover, he prayed that they would abound in hope, and this would happen through the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:8.)

Thus the argument of the book ends with a prayer for the readers to receive a definite personal experience. One

more time the book underscores the importance of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

Note: Legalism and Christian liberty

Failure to apply the teaching on questions of conscience correctly can lead to serious errors. Some practically ignore it, thereby promoting legalism and restricting Christian liberty. Others insist on “liberty” of personal opinions in moral areas or in areas where the Bible speaks, thereby destroying many practical, scriptural holiness teachings. In order to put Romans 14:1-15:13 in perspective, we briefly discuss legalism and Christian liberty in this section. For more detailed treatment of these two topics see Chapters 3 and 4 of *Practical Holiness: A Second Look* by David K. Bernard.

In general, legalism means strict or excessive conformity to a legal code or set of rules. In a Christian context, legalism has two negative connotations: (1) attempting to base salvation on the performance of good works or on the strict observance of rules and regulations and (2) imposing rules on self and others that are not based on clear biblical teachings or principles. We are guilty of *legalism* if we imply that man attains *salvation by works* or if we preach *rules without principles*.

We can avoid legalism if we preach (1) salvation by faith not works, (2) holiness as the necessary result of new life in Christ not the means of obtaining salvation, (3) moral law not ceremonial law, and (4) biblical teachings and principles not traditions of men. Instead of trying to enforce Christian living by external rules, we must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to develop holiness in the lives of believers. Of course, in

discipling converts and overseeing saints it is necessary to make practical applications of biblical principles.

The biblical meaning of *Christian liberty* is threefold.

(1) *Freedom from sin.* Before conversion we were under bondage to sin. Now, as Spirit-filled persons we have power over sin (John 8:32-36; Romans 6:1-23).

(2) *Freedom from the law.* This does not mean God has abolished moral law, but that we are free from the Old Testament law in several specific ways: (a) *Freedom from the penalty of the law*, which is death (Galatians 3:13). Christ died in our stead, so the law has no power to condemn us. (b) *Freedom from the attempt to fulfill the law by human effort alone.* Old Testament saints were bound to the law like children to tutors and governors (Galatians 4). They did not have full power to overcome the flesh and fulfill God's moral law, but we now have that power through the Spirit (Romans 7:5-6; 8:3-4; Hebrews 8:7-13). (c) *Freedom from the destructive power of the law caused by man's abuse of it.* The law, which was good in itself, actually became a harmful force because men erroneously relied on it for justification and so rejected faith in Christ (Romans 9:31-10:4; Galatians 2:16-21). (d) *Freedom from the ceremonial law* (Mark 7:15; Acts 15; Galatians 4; Colossians 2:16-17).

(3) *Freedom in nonmoral matters.* We are free to participate in any activity that does not violate biblical teaching. We have freedom to follow individual judgment, desire, and conscience in morally neutral areas such as the eating of meat and the observance of certain days (Romans 14). In these matters, we must not judge each other, but we should be true to our own convictions.

Christian liberty does not negate our responsibility to

obey scriptural teachings on holiness (Romans 6:15; Galatians 5:13, 19-21). Christian liberty does not eliminate our responsibility to follow godly leaders when they apply biblical principles of holiness to contemporary issues (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 15:28-29).

Certainly, then, our liberty does not permit us to indulge in fleshly desires, to commit sin, or to violate God's Word in any way. We also find four important guidelines for the proper exercise of Christian liberty, even with respect to nonmoral matters. We have Christian liberty to participate in a morally neutral activity only:

(1) *If God is glorified in it* (Romans 14:6; I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17).

(2) *If it is beneficial to us*—if it is not detrimental physically, mentally, or spiritually (I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23).

(3) *If we can maintain control over it*—if it does not rob us of too much energy, time, or money or otherwise interfere with our relationship to God (I Corinthians 6:12).

(4) *If it is not a stumbling block*—if it is not a spiritual harm to others (I Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:32-33; Romans 14:15-21).

Something can be morally neutral in itself and yet violate one of these principles. Some things are detrimental to some people and not to others, because of differences of personality, maturity, background, or experience before conversion. A certain situation may pose great temptation to one person but not to another. Because of individual differences, God may impress certain personal convictions on some people and not on others. Thus it is very important for each person to be true to his own con-

victions and not try to tear down the convictions of others.

Christian liberty teaches us to be tolerant of the different personal convictions and preferences of fellow Christians. In no case do we compromise with sin. The legalist who does not understand Christian liberty will label everything as either sinful or perfectly permissible. There are “weights” or hindrances as well as outright sins, however (Hebrews 12:1). Some things are not necessarily sinful in themselves, yet they are not beneficial to Christian living. In such cases, a proper exercise of Christian liberty would cause us to avoid them. Yet, if someone does not agree totally on this issue, we can still accept his status as a Christian. In this way, we can warn of the dangers of certain practices without being legalistic. Christian liberty allows us to have fellowship with other believers without having to agree totally on every personal conviction.

Footnote

¹ Bruce, p. 243.

VII.

Epilogue

(15:14-16:27)

Personal conclusion

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Epilogue (15:14-16:27)

The final portion of the Roman epistle takes the form of a personal conclusion. While the bulk of the book resembles a doctrinal treatise more than a letter, in this section the characteristics of a letter predominate. Paul discussed his goals as an apostle, including his reason for writing and his personal plans for the future. In the process, he elaborated on several points alluded to in the prologue. He concluded with a recommendation of a Christian worker, greetings to numerous Roman saints, final instructions and warnings, and a closing expression of praise to God. Although the epilogue is not primarily a teaching passage, we can glean many valuable spiritual insights and lessons from Paul's concluding remarks.

A. Paul's Reason for Writing (15:14-21)

(14) Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. (15) Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, (16) that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (17) Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain

to God. (18) For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—(19) in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (20) And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, (21) but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand."

Verse 14 begins the concluding section of Romans by explaining Paul's purpose in writing to the Roman church. As in chapter 1, where he explained why he planned to visit them, here Paul used a very tactful approach. He noted that the Roman Christians were full of goodness, filled with all knowledge (spiritual perception), and capable of instructing one another (competent). (The critical text says "others" instead of "one another.") In short, he acknowledged they were mature Christians without his assistance.

Verse 15. (The critical text omits "brethren.") Verse 15 explains why Paul felt it necessary to write anyway and, in particular, why he wrote quite boldly in places. (Perhaps he had in mind his frequent declarations, "Certainly not!"—particularly the repudiation in chapter 6 of sin in a Christian's life.) First, he saw the letter as a valuable reminder to them of truths they had already encountered. Second, God had given him a special grace—that is, a special ministry to fulfill.

Verse 16. This special ministry was his calling to be an

apostle to the Gentiles. In fulfilling this God-given responsibility, Paul probably felt compelled to minister to Rome since it was the foremost Gentile city of his day.

Preachers and teachers today can learn a valuable lesson from Paul's inspired approach. They should recognize whatever degree of truth and maturity their hearers already have and commend them for it. Instead of arrogantly proclaiming their intention to correct every fault in the audience, they should humbly offer service and bring truths to remembrance. They must preach God's message and fulfill God's calling, not because they feel so capable and think the church is so deficient, but because God has charged them to do so. The audience must feel that the preacher is not speaking from human ego, desires, or motives, but rather with divine commissioning and anointing. If Paul with his great calling, ability, and accomplishments took this approach, how much more should preachers today!

Paul's calling was to be "a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles." The noun *minister* here (Greek *leitourgos*) means "an administrative servant or a religious servant." Paul's task was "ministering the gospel of God." The verb *ministering* (Greek, *hierourgeo*) means "to perform holy service, to act as a priest, to sacrifice." Preaching the gospel was his priestly service. The purpose of this service was to present to God an offering, a gift, or a sacrifice of the Gentiles. Paul was not trying to accumulate a record number of "decisions for Christ" or even a record number baptized in the name of Jesus and filled with the Holy Ghost. Rather, he wanted to offer up a people acceptable to God. They had to be sanctified—clean, holy, separated from sin to God by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 17. Having established that his letter to the Romans was a consequence of his divine calling and his priestly service, Paul elaborated on the nature of his calling, demonstrating that he indeed had an apostolic calling. Although he refused to exalt himself, he gloried or boasted in Christ Jesus concerning the things of God. He rejoiced in what Christ had done in his ministry.

Verse 18. He refused to take credit for the achievements of others or even to take credit for what had been done in his own ministry; he spoke only of what Christ had done through him. "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me . . ." (*NIV*).

The purpose of Christ's work through Paul was to bring the Gentiles to obedience. Again, we cannot separate faith from the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Paul's ministry was not to bring men just to a point of mental assent, but to motivate them to obey the gospel. Anything less than full obedience to the gospel message falls short of the saving faith that Paul preached.

Christ's work in Paul's ministry was both in word and deed. Paul boldly proclaimed the Word everywhere he went. Moreover, his ministry enacted the Word through physical results. This could encompass the obedient response of believers as well as the physical miracles performed in his ministry. A true apostolic ministry today must be both in word and deed.

Verse 19. Specifically, the deeds included mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (I Corinthians

2:4). If we are to reach our world as Paul reached his, we too must have an apostolic ministry of miracles performed by the power of the Spirit.

Through this anointed, powerful, miraculous ministry Paul was able to preach the gospel fully from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Jerusalem was the starting point of the apostolic church and the seat of spiritual leadership in the early church. Illyricum was a Roman province on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. This area, also called Dalmatia, was northwest of Macedonia in what is now Yugoslavia. It represented the westernmost extent of Paul's ministry to that time, the point in his journeys farthest from Jerusalem.

Acts does not record that Paul preached in Illyricum. Perhaps the reference is to preaching in Macedonia up to the border of Illyricum. Perhaps Paul actually preached in Illyricum when he went to Macedonia after his Ephesian ministry (Acts 20:1-6). This would have been just before his journey to Jerusalem with the offering for the poor saints and just before the Roman letter.

Although Paul had not preached in every village between Jerusalem and Illyricum, he had established churches in the major Gentile cities between those two extremities. He had accomplished his task of bringing the gospel to those areas, establishing churches that could carry on the work of evangelization.

Verse 20. Paul's calling was to be a pioneer. He endeavored to preach only where Christ had not been preached before. He deliberately avoided working in areas where others had labored. Elsewhere he described himself as a planter and as one who lays the foundation (I Corinthians 3:6, 10).

Verse 21. In preaching the gospel to those who had never heard, Paul endeavored to fulfill Isaiah 52:15.

Not every ministry is one like Paul's. Paul recognized that others watered and others built on his foundation (I Corinthians 3:6-10). Nevertheless, preachers today should have the same burden to evangelize the lost, to introduce people to Christ for the first time. The church must always actively press forward into areas where no one has ever preached Christ in the fulness of the gospel. Local churches must never become complacent and satisfied with their accomplishments but must always maintain a vigorous outreach to the lost. Preachers should not seek positions of comfort purchased by the labor of others. Even when they continue a work begun by another they must always seek to advance the gospel further. Moreover, they should never seek to build a ministry or a local congregation by tearing down or taking away from another's ministry.

B. Paul's Personal Plans (15:22-33)

(22) For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. (23) But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, (24) whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. (25) But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. (26) For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. (27) It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles

have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. (28) Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. (29) But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. (30) Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, (31) that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, (32) that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. (33) Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Having explained the reason for his letter and the apostolic ministry that prompted it, Paul summarized his personal plans. He again assured the Romans of his intention to visit them as soon as possible, but he explained why he first had to go to Jerusalem.

Verse 22. In 1:13 Paul mentioned that, despite his earnest desire, he had been hindered from coming to Rome before this time. This verse reveals what hindered him: the necessity of preaching first in places where the gospel had not yet come. Rome already had a church, so, following the policy described in 15:20-21, Paul was constrained to preach first in those areas between Jerusalem and Rome that lacked a witness.

Verse 23. By this time, however, he had no further opportunity to open up new territories east of Rome since he had fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum. He was finally in a position to fulfill his desire of

many years to visit the Roman church. (In view of Paul's professed policy in verse 20 not to build on another man's foundation, it is unlikely that another apostle—such as Peter—had founded the Roman church and still less likely that any apostle was at that time the presiding bishop of the Roman church.)

Verse 24. Even in fulfilling his long-held desire to visit Rome, however, Paul planned to do so on the way to opening up a new territory for the gospel—Spain. It seems he could only justify his indulgence by using it to further his pioneer ministry. In all his plans Paul never abandoned his intense missionary zeal. (The critical text omits the phrase, “I shall come to you.”)

Not only did this proposed journey have a missionary motive as well as a personal one, but even the stopover in Rome had a twofold purpose. Paul desired to enjoy the company of the Roman saints as much as possible, but he also planned to solicit support from them for his missionary trip to Spain. As in 1:12, Paul courteously expressed his high valuation of the Roman church's fellowship.

The Bible nowhere records that Paul actually reached Spain. At the close of the Book of Acts he did arrive in Rome, albeit in different circumstances than he had envisioned—as a prisoner. Historical evidence indicates that Paul was released in Rome, then later imprisoned a second time there and executed. Some tradition indicates that he indeed visited Spain during the intervening time, but there is no definite evidence to support this supposition.

Verse 25. Before Paul could visit Rome, however, he had one specific task to accomplish: he needed to travel

to Jerusalem to minister to the saints there. Here the Greek verb *fir* “minister” is *diakoneo*—“to serve, wait on, support, help.”

Verse 26. Specifically, he was going to bring financial contributions from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to poor saints in Jerusalem. Macedonia and Achaia were Roman provinces that comprised the bulk of ancient Greece. Macedonia was to the north of Greece proper and contained the cities of Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi. Achaia contained Athens and Corinth. These two provinces were the site of Paul’s most recent ministry (Acts 19:21), but apparently other areas, such as Galatia, contributed also (I Corinthians 16:1). References to this collection are found in Acts 24:17, I Corinthians 16:1-4, and II Corinthians 8 and 9.

Verse 27. Although this was a free-will offering, Paul regarded it as the payment of a moral debt owed by the Gentile churches to the mother church in Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians had shared the gospel and all its spiritual blessings with the Gentiles, so the latter had an obligation to render service (Greek, *leitourgeo*) in material (*KJV*, “carnal”) things. The Jewish church had supplied the spiritual needs of the Gentiles; it was only fitting that the Gentiles supply the material needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Verse 28. The verb *seal* with its legal and business connotations indicates that Paul considered it his personal duty to deliver this offering officially. He desired to present safely to the home church this tangible fruit of his labors. Perhaps the word *seal* also indicates Paul’s desire for this offering to cement the fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians. After fulfilling this sacred trust he

would be free to visit Rome on the way to Spain.

Verse 29. Though his coming to Rome would be somewhat delayed by this business, he was confident that when he did come he would come with the fulness of divine blessing and approval. (The critical text omits “of the gospel.”)

Verse 30. At this point Paul earnestly entreated the Roman church to pray for the success of his mission. He pleaded for them to contend along with him in prayer. As does 1:9, this verse emphasizes the value and importance of intercessory prayer. Paul truly believed that the prayers of others made a crucial difference in his life and ministry. He based his appeal to the Romans on the highest motives: through their mutual Lord and the love (Greek, *agape*) of the Spirit.

Verse 31. His prayer request was threefold. His first petition was to be delivered from Jewish unbelievers. His second petition was to be accepted by Jewish believers. Paul apparently anticipated trouble in both areas, and events proved his foreboding to be correct (Acts 21). Many Jewish Christians had doubts about him, having heard rumors that he taught Jews in Gentile lands to abandon the law of Moses. The leaders in Jerusalem requested him to take a Jewish vow to reassure the people that he still observed Jewish customs. Many Jewish unbelievers hated Paul for preaching to the Gentiles and, in their eyes, tearing down the law of Moses. When he went to the Temple to fulfill his vow, they started a riot and attempted to kill him. Only the intervention of Roman soldiers saved him.

Verse 32. Paul’s third petition was that he might come to Rome with joy, in the will of God, and find refreshing there. As in 1:10, Paul was careful to condition his desire

to visit Rome on the will of God. He wanted to come to Rome, but only in the will of God. As in 1:12, he stressed the mutual blessing his visit would bring.

Paul's prayers were answered, although not as he expected. God indeed delivered him from Jewish unbelievers in Jerusalem. He did gain favor with Jewish Christians. He did come to Rome, but as a prisoner. Through it all, God's will was accomplished.

Verse 33. In summarizing these plans, Paul commended his readers to the God of peace. After requesting prayer of them, he offered a prayer of his own for them. (Paul used the same title for God in 16:20. Similar use of other titles can be found in 15:5 and 15:13.)

C. Recommendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)

(1) I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea, (2) that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer [helper] of many, and of myself also (King James Version).

Verse 1 inserts a recommendation of Phoebe (Greek form), a worker in the church at Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth. (See Acts 18:18.) This passage indicates strongly that Paul wrote the letter in Corinth and that Phoebe delivered the letter to Rome.

Phoebe is called a "sister," which demonstrates the early Christian custom of addressing fellow believers as brothers and sisters in the Lord. She was also a "servant" of the Cenchrean church. The Greek word is *diakonos*, the same word translated as "deacon" in Philippians 1:1

and I Timothy 3:12. It is logical to conclude that Phoebe was a deaconness, although some commentators propose that the word is used in a general, nontechnical sense here. Many scholars point to I Timothy 3:11 as additional evidence for deaconesses, since the Greek word translated as “wives” there can simply mean “women.” In any case it is evident from Romans 16:1 and subsequent references in chapter 16 that many women occupied prominent positions of responsibility and service in the New Testament church. The use of this recommendation procedure also evidences a significant degree of cooperation and organization among the churches.

Verse 2 calls Phoebe a helper or, literally, a “patroness or protectress” (Greek, *prostatis*). This word could imply that Phoebe was a woman of wealth and high social position, which could explain her ability and need to journey to Rome on personal business. At any rate Paul noted her great assistance to many people, including himself. He asked that the Roman church receive her in a way worthy of saints and assist her in any way possible.

D. Greetings to the Roman Saints (16:3-16)

(3) Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers [fellow workers] in Christ Jesus; (4) who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (5) Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute [greet] my well-beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ. (6) Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us. (7) Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (8) Greet Amplias, my be-

loved in the Lord. (9) Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. (10) Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. (11) Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. (12) Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord, (13) Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. (14) Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them. (15) Salute Philologus and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them. (16) Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you (King James Version).

In this section, Paul sent greetings to twenty-six individuals (most of whom are mentioned only here), two households, and three house churches. (The two households were probably house churches also.) Many of the references to these people are intriguing and tantalizing, but in most cases we can only speculate as to who they were and what they did. It may seem strange that Paul knew so many saints in a city he had never visited, but he had already heard many reports about the Roman church (1:8; 16:19). In addition, he had apparently worked with or converted many of these people in other places, and the changes of life had eventually brought them to the big city.

At first glance these greetings may not seem very significant compared to the rest of the epistle, yet they demonstrate several very important truths. First, they help confirm the authenticity of the epistle. If the epistle

were not genuine, why would someone include so many irrelevant greetings that could easily be proven false?

The passage shows that the Apostle Peter was not the pastor in Rome at this time and therefore could not reasonably be the founder of the church. If he were present, Paul would have certainly included him in this extensive list of greetings, especially when he greeted so many obscure people. In a notably courteous passage, it would have been uncharacteristically rude to ignore the founding, presiding bishop.

We should note the prominent role of women in the early church. Paul mentioned ten women in this chapter, appending a special comment in all but two cases. He used these terms to describe various ones of them: servant (possibly deaconess), helper, fellow worker, one of note among the apostles, and laborer in the gospel. Obviously he did not resent women working in the church.

We should note the courtesy, personal affection, and Christian love of the Apostle Paul. He took time to express his sincere appreciation for the service, kindness, and friendship of individuals, even of otherwise unknown people.

Moreover, the passage demonstrates the close fellowship and the sincere devotion present in the early church. We get a beautiful glimpse of the saints' devotion to, suffering for, and labor in the gospel as well as their total life of faith, hope, and love.

Verse 3. Paul first greeted Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who had worked closely with Paul in the gospel (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; I Corinthians 16:19; II Timothy 4:19). Priscilla is the diminutive (familiar) form of the proper name Prisca, and this latter name is what Paul

actually used in the Greek text here. Perhaps Priscilla was of the noble Roman family named Prisca. If so, her high social standing could be one reason why, in sharp contrast to normal custom, she is mentioned before her husband Aquila, who was a Jew from Pontus. It is also likely that she is mentioned first here (and in most of the passages cited above) because of a more impressive personality and a more prominent role in church work.

Verse 4. Priscilla and Aquila had risked their lives for Paul's sake. They had performed notable service worthy of thanks from many Gentile churches as well as from Paul himself. The Bible does not record the events Paul alluded to here.

Verse 5. A local congregation met in the house of this couple. While all the saints in a city were considered part of the one church of that city, there was usually no place where everyone could meet together. There were no church buildings. Usually they met in small groups in individual homes. Each gathering could be called a church in one sense of the word, as Paul did here. In many respects the leader of the local house church would correspond to a modern pastor. Apparently, the house church leaders were the elders of the church in the city, with a presiding elder or bishop over the entire city.

Mention is made of Epaenetus, who was the firstfruits of Achaia, or Asia according to the critical text. Apparently, he was Paul's first convert in the Roman province of Asia in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Verse 6. Paul greeted a woman named Mary, who had labored much for "us," or "you" according to the critical text. (Only one letter distinguishes the two words in Greek.)

Verse 7. Andronicus and Junia were Paul's kinsmen and fellow prisoners. The Greek word for kinsmen can mean either "relatives" or "countrymen." They were prisoners with Paul on an occasion unknown to us. They were also Christians before Paul. If they were indeed Paul's blood relations, as seems likely from his apparent familiarity with them before his conversion, then further light is shed upon Paul's conversion. In this case, he not only had been exposed to the preaching of Stephen but also to the Christian witness of relatives, and perhaps had struggled with it for a long time. This would help explain the Lord's words to him, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). His dramatic conversion, then, would not have come out of nowhere, but would have been the culmination of an internal battle in his heart.

Andronicus and Junia were "of note among the apostles." This could mean they were well-known to the apostles. More probably it means they were well-known as apostles. Of course, they were not of the Twelve, but were apostles in the broader sense of the Greek word, that is, "ones sent with a commission." This is similar to the modern concept of pioneer missionaries. In this sense Paul and Barnabas were called apostles (Acts 14:14).

There is some question as to whether the second name should be Junia (feminine), as the *KJV*, *NKJV*, and most ancient authorities say, or Junias (masculine), as many modern translations say. Some manuscripts even render it Julia (feminine). Assuming it is feminine, then Andronicus and Junia were probably a husband and wife team like Priscilla and Aquila. Of course, it offends many theologians today to call a female an apostle in any sense of the word, even as part of a husband and wife mission-

ary team. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich state that it is impossible to determine whether the name should be masculine or feminine but remark, "The possibility . . . that this is a woman's name . . . (ancient commentators took Andr. and Junia as a married couple . . .) deserves consideration."¹

Verse 8. Paul saluted Amplias, whom he deeply loved in the Lord. The Greek text actually uses the full version of the name, Ampliatus.

Verse 9. Greetings went to Urbanus (more correct form), another co-worker, and Stachys, another man especially loved.

Verse 10. Apelles is described as one tested and approved. Perhaps he was a veteran worker or had endured severe trials. Paul used a personal touch to vary his descriptions of the individuals according to their noteworthy characteristics. Salutations were also given to the household of Aristobulus.

Verse 11. Paul addressed Herodion, another relative or perhaps merely a fellow Jew, and the believers of the household of Narcissus. Possibly Aristobulus and Narcissus were prominent citizens with large families and many servants. Perhaps in these two verses Paul actually addressed two churches that met in their respective houses.

Verse 12. Three female gospel workers are mentioned here. The names of Tryphena and Tryphosa suggest that they were sisters, possibly twins. Paul very properly referred to Persis as "the beloved," instead of "my beloved."

Verse 13. Rufus was perhaps the son of Simon the Cyrenian, the man who bore Christ's cross (Mark 15:21).

That Rufus the son of Simon was known to the early church is suggested by the unusual care Mark took to mention his name. Rufus evidently had a special calling of God on his life. Paul metaphorically identified the mother of Rufus as his own; she evidently had a special, maternal relationship to Paul.

Verse 14. Another house church is identified here. The names in this verse occur nowhere else in Scripture. Hermas is not the same man who wrote the popular devotional book known as *The Shepherd*, for that was written several generations later.

Verse 15. Yet another house church is addressed. Philologus and Julia were probably a married couple or possibly brother and sister.

Verse 16 concludes these individual salutations by exhorting the Romans to greet each other with a holy kiss. There is no evidence that God meant to establish this as a special ordinance. Rather, it was a typical eastern and Jewish mode of greeting for people of the same sex to embrace one another and kiss each other on the cheek. According to ancient church history, early Christians did practice the “kiss of peace.” In essence, Romans commands Christians to greet one another warmly as fellow members of the family of God. The modern Western equivalent is to shake hands and for the same sex to hug one another.

The critical text includes the word “all” at the beginning of the second sentence of the verse. All the churches sent their greeting to Rome. No doubt this came from the delegates who were joining Paul for the Jerusalem trip and offering (Acts 20:4).

E. Final Admonition (16:17-20)

(17) Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (18) For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (19) For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. (20) And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen (King James Version).

This admonition strikes an unusual note for the epistle, for only here did Paul assert his apostolic authority in such a strong manner. Throughout the epistle he was very careful and tactful, appealing to the Scriptures and reason to establish his propositions, mindful that he had not converted the Romans, nor even ministered to them. God evidently considered this warning to be so important, however, as to justify a strong, authoritative admonition.

Verse 17. This final admonition was a warning against troublemakers. The Romans are strongly urged to watch out for and keep away from troublemakers. The rest of the epistle does not provide evidence of any such problems in the Roman church at that time—to the contrary, it is highly complimentary (1:8; 15:14; 16:19). Apparently God was warning the Romans to guard against future problems. Paul had already encountered severe problems in Galatia with the arrival of the Judaizers. These were Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile Christians must keep the law of Moses to be

saved. Paul foresaw that these outsiders would soon make their way to Rome and foment strife there.

Specifically the Romans were to note and avoid those who cause divisions (factions in the church) and offenses (stumbling blocks or obstacles that hinder people in finding and serving God). They were to avoid people who erected obstacles contrary to the teaching they had received, which included this epistle.

Verse 18 describes the condition of these troublemakers. Instead of serving the Lord, they serve their own appetites or lusts. In other words, they are hirelings. By smooth talk and flattering words they deceive the simple. The Greek word translated as “simple” (*akakos*) here means “innocent, guileless, or unsuspecting.” The method of these hirelings stands in stark contrast to Paul’s own proclamation of the gospel: “And I . . . did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God . . . And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (I Corinthians 2:1, 4). (The critical text says “Lord Christ” instead of “Lord Jesus Christ.”)

Verse 19 assures the Romans of Paul’s confidence in them and their ability to stay true. As noted in 1:8, the Roman church had a good reputation throughout Christianity and Paul rejoiced in that. In particular, they were known for their obedience. Nevertheless, God admonishes them to be wise concerning good but simple-minded or innocent concerning evil. The Greek word translated as “simple” in this verse (*akeraios*) means “pure, innocent.” It is the same word translated as “harmless” in Christ’s teaching, “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”

(Matthew 10:16), so verse 19 seems to be an allusion to the earlier words of Christ.

Verse 20 gives assurance of victory. The God of peace (see 15:33) will bring peace in battle by destroying the opposition. He will shortly crush Satan under the feet of the church. The word translated as “shortly” can mean either “soon” or “swiftly.” Perhaps the emphasis is that when the conquest of Satan comes, it will be swift.

Verse 20 evidently alludes to Genesis 3:15, in which God told the serpent: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” By applying this prophecy about Christ to God, Romans actually equates Christ with God. It also equates Satan being bruised by Christ with Satan being crushed under the feet of the church. Since the church is Christ’s body, the church will participate in the crushing of Satan and will emerge victorious over Satan.

On this triumphant note, a blessing is pronounced on the Roman church: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (The critical text omits “Christ” and “Amen.”)

While the strong admonition of this section is somewhat unusual for the Book of Romans, similar warnings about troublemakers, hirelings, deceivers, and false prophets are common in the New Testament epistles. (See Philippians 3:18-19, II Timothy 3:6, Titus 1:10-11, II Peter 2:12-19, and Jude 11-16.)

F. Greetings from Paul’s Companions (16:21-24)

(21) Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute [greet] you. (22)

I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. (23) Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain [treasurer] of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. (24) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (King James Version).

Those with Paul at the time the letter was written also sent their greetings. As does 16:3-16, this passage demonstrates the brotherhood, affection, and love of the early church. It helps to identify Corinth as the location where it was written. It also serves to authenticate the epistle, particularly the last part of it.

Verse 21 evidently records salutations from Paul's traveling companions. Timothy, Paul's co-worker, is well-known from Acts, I and II Timothy, and various references in Paul's epistles. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater could be the same men mentioned in Acts 13:1, 17:5-7, and 20:4, but there is no proof as the names were fairly common. The men were Paul's kinsmen, probably here meaning only countrymen or fellow Jews. Lucius (Greek, *Loukios*) was probably not the New Testament writer Luke, for Paul always referred to the latter as *Loukas* (Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Moreover, as a Gentile, Luke was not Paul's kinsman in any sense (although one can punctuate the verse so only Jason and Sosipater would be the kinsmen).

Verse 22. Tertius, the Christian scribe who recorded the epistle for Paul, sent his greetings. Paul typically dictated his letters to a scribe (I Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18; II Thessalonians 3:17). Perhaps this helps to explain Paul's vigorous, fresh, quick style and his frequent interruptions and digressions in mid-thought.

Verse 23 records greetings from Christians in the city where Paul was, which this verse helps to identify as Corinth. Gaius was one of the few converts in Corinth whom Paul had personally baptized (I Corinthians 1:14). He was Paul's host at this time as well as host of the whole church. Apparently the Corinthian church met in his house or perhaps he was a well-known host of the Christians who visited Corinth. Gaius was a very common name, and the one here probably is not the same as those in Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4, and III John 1.

Erastus was the city treasurer. It is interesting to see that at least one early Christian occupied a very high position in society—the treasurer of one of the largest cities of the day. This man was probably not the same as those mentioned in Acts 19:22 and II Timothy 4:20, although the latter reference is linked with Corinth. Archeologists have discovered a paving block from first-century Corinth that had the name Erastus inscribed as director of public works. Although the two positions and the two Greek words describing them are not the same, the *NIV* uses the latter title in translating verse 23. Probably Erastus received a promotion from director of public works to city treasurer.

Quartus is otherwise unknown. In the Greek he is singled out as “the” brother, perhaps meaning “our” brother or “his” brother. Perhaps he was simply present when Paul sent the letter. Some have speculated that Tertius was the older brother of Quartus since their names mean “third” and “fourth” respectively.

Verse 24 is another benediction invoking the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the readers. According to the critical text it is not original, but was perhaps added

under the influence of the benediction in verse 20, which it duplicates almost exactly. Most existing Greek manuscripts place 16:25-27 earlier in the epistle (see below) and place verse 24 last. Verse 24 was accepted as a more fitting and more correct ending than verse 23, since verse 24 is a benediction similar to the final verses in Paul's other epistles.

G. Doxology (16:25-27)

(25) Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, (26) but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: (27) to God, only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (King James Version).

Unlike Paul's other epistles, Romans closes with a passage of praise to God. The majority of Greek manuscripts place this passage after 14:23. Perhaps ancient copyists did not think it could be the ending since it was not a benediction like Paul's other epistles had in closing. The alternate position may also indicate that Romans was sometimes circulated to other churches without the personal material of chapters 15 and 16. Even if one questions the placement of this passage, there is no reason to question its authenticity.

Although different from Paul's usual benediction, this passage is an appropriate ending for this unique epistle. It echoes themes from the opening verses of the epistle.

Perhaps Paul added this ending after Tertius finished the letter and read it back to him. It was Paul's custom to close with a note in his own hand (II Thessalonians 3:17), so this doxology could very well be Paul's personal sign-off. This grand anthem of praise is certainly a fitting conclusion to the book.

Verse 25. Paul dedicated this praise to the omnipotent God. He noted God's power to establish the Roman believers—something Paul desired in 1:11. This establishing occurs by (or is promised by) "my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." As in 2:16 Paul personalized the gospel. As in 1:16 Paul emphasized that the power of God is in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This happens in accordance with the revelation of the mystery hidden from ages past. The word *mystery* as used in the New Testament refers to secret thoughts and plans of God hidden from human reason, which God must reveal to man if he is to understand it. In Paul's writings a mystery is something once secret but now revealed.

Verse 26. This mystery has now been made known to all nations. The revelation has been made possible and has come to pass at the command of the eternal God. The mystery has been revealed through the "scriptures of the prophets," or prophetic Scriptures. This appears to mean the Old Testament, but if so, how could the mystery be revealed in the Old Testament and yet be hidden from the world at the same time? Perhaps the answer is this: Although the Old Testament contains prophecies that, when correctly interpreted and proclaimed, do make known God's secret plans for man, only in light of the preaching of Jesus Christ by the New Testament church has man come to a full understanding of those prophecies.

Alternatively, perhaps the reference is to New Testament prophecy—the inspired writings of New Testament authors, which were then being composed, circulated, and collected. After all, the primary meaning of “prophetic” is “inspired of God,” not “predictive of the future.” The comparison with Ephesians 3:5 (see below) lends credence to this interpretation.

What exactly is the mystery here? If the second clause of verse 25 is a restatement of the first, then the mystery would be the preaching of Jesus Christ. That is, God manifested Himself in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16), purchased our salvation by the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, offers salvation to all mankind through faith in Christ, and enables man to repent, be baptized in Jesus’ name for the remission of sins, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. This was God’s plan from the beginning. The Old Testament prophesied about it, the New Testament preached it, and it has now been clearly revealed to mankind.

Even more specifically, the mystery probably relates to God’s plan for the New Testament church. All along God planned and the Old Testament predicted that God would establish a new covenant and would have a body of Spirit-filled, called-out believers. God planned to save the Gentiles, but, even more, God planned to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body by the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ. (See Romans 3:21-31; 4:9-17; 9:24-29; 15:7-13.) This mystery is described in Ephesians 3:3-6 and this specific meaning seems to fit the context of Romans best: “By revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

The purpose for the revelation of the mystery to all nations is to produce “obedience to the faith” (*NKJV*). The *KJV* calls it “the obedience of faith.” The *NIV* says the mystery has been revealed “so that all nations might believe and obey him.” As does 1:17 this verse emphasizes justification by faith, and as does 1:5 it emphasizes the obedience of faith. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* defines this as “the obedience which faith puts in operation.”²

Many people rightly preach justification by faith on the authority of the Book of Romans. Many of these same people, however, define faith as mere mental assent, intellectual acceptance, or verbal confession. They need to understand faith as the Book of Romans presents it—as inseparable from obedience.

Verse 27 concludes the sentence by returning to the thought that began in verse 25: giving praise to God. The inspired apostle acknowledged one God, who alone is wise, to whom he gave eternal glory through Christ. This verse is very similar to Jude 25: “To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

As grace and peace come to us from God through Christ (1:7) and as we should offer thanks to God through Christ (1:8), so we should give glory to God through Jesus Christ. God deserves eternal glory for who He is, but He specifically deserves eternal glory for manifesting Himself and providing salvation through Christ. The one

God who incarnated Himself as Jesus Christ will reign throughout eternity as the exalted Christ with his glorified human body (Revelation 22:3-5). As Jesus Christ, God will receive praise, worship, and glory from His church throughout eternity. To God be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen!—let it be so!

Footnotes

¹Walter Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 380.

²*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1226.

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