

# **EXPOSITORY NOTES**

## **ROMANS**

**Gordon Lyons**

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# Expository Notes

## *Romans*

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### **Romans**

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## Introduction and Background

The apostle Paul was the author of Romans. He wrote this letter shortly before his visit to Jerusalem with the monetary contributions from the Gentile churches. Paul had hoped to visit Rome before continuing on to his planned visit to Spain. Eventually, Paul did visit Rome, but not in the manner that he envisaged. He arrived there as a prisoner, after having been arrested by the Jews in Jerusalem. While there for a two-year period, the apostle is thought to have written his 'prison epistles', Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

Although placed first in the list of Paul's epistles, Romans was not the first to be written by him. Others, such as Galatians, Corinthians and Thessalonians were probably written earlier.

Romans may have been written between A.D. 55 and A.D. 58. Narrowing this down somewhat, a date between A.D. 57 and A.D. 58 appears most likely, since the collection from the Gentile churches seems to have been ready for taking to Jerusalem.

The apostle may have written this letter from Corinth. Pheobe (from nearby Cenchrea) had been entrusted as the letter-bearer. Furthermore, the mention of Gaius, Paul's host (Rom. 16:23), would appear to identify Corinth as the city where the apostle had written this letter.

Paul's reference to the fact that the Roman believer's faith was well known throughout the world (Rom. 1:8), may imply that this church had been established for some time before the apostle wrote this letter. However, the Roman church had not been founded by the apostle Paul.

Concerning the apostle Peter's alleged connection with the church at Rome, the apostle Paul makes no reference to Peter's presence at Rome, either at the time of writing or in the past. This omission would have been a grievous discourtesy to the apostle Peter had he in any way been connected with the Roman church. In fact, according to Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century church father, the Roman church was not founded by any of the apostles. Furthermore, Peter was one of the 'pillars' of the church at Jerusalem, together with James the Lord's brother, and John.

In this epistle, the apostle provides the fullest measure of teaching concerning the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as it was to be applied to the Christian's character and conduct. He deals with major doctrines such as regeneration, justification and sanctification, together with the necessity of the resurrection. In addition, Paul speaks of imputed righteousness, the necessity of faith, the place of faith in relation to works, and freedom (but not licence) in relation to the law.

The apostle to the Gentiles also provides much exhortation and assurance for the believers at Rome (and to believers everywhere). He addresses such subjects as the utter depravity of fallen sinful mankind, the sovereignty of God in divine election, the believer's eternal assurance in Christ Jesus, and their responsibilities toward God and toward the civil authorities. This was especially important to the Roman believers under Caesar, but its principles are equally applicable to believers everywhere.

The apostle Paul devotes an entire section of this letter to speak of Israel's place in the plan and purposes of God. Israel rejected their Messiah, but—although God has set them aside for the time being—he has not rejected them finally, and he has not excluded the Jewish people totally from the blessings now coming on the Gentiles through faith in Christ. God will yet show mercy to Israel. Israel will yet find salvation in their Messiah.



# Romans Chapter 1

## Introductory Remarks

### ***Romans 1:1-17***

#### **Romans 1:1**

Paul, the apostle, introduces himself to the believers at Rome. Thus far, Paul has never personally visited the church at Rome, but he was hoping to do so in the near future. At the time of writing, Paul was probably at Corinth. Shortly, he would be leaving that city to visit the saints at Jerusalem. Once this work was completed, the apostle hoped to set out for Spain. On his way to Spain, he intended to visit the church at Rome.

Paul introduces himself to the Roman believers as a servant—bondservant or bond slave—of Christ Jesus. He is bound to serve his Lord and Master with all of his being, and he is totally committed to the preaching of the Gospel. God had set Paul apart for a specific purpose: to proclaim the name of Christ among the Gentiles. To this end, The Lord had appointed Paul to be an apostle. He was God's ambassador, commissioned to carry the Good News of eternal salvation to lost mankind. Paul's ministry was concentrated chiefly, but not exclusively, among the Gentiles.

Paul emphasised his qualifications and office as God's servant by declaring that God had called him to be an apostle or ambassador of Christ. To this end, Paul adds, the Lord had set him apart from birth—or from his mother's womb—for the gospel of God. (Acts 9:3-20; 26:13-20; 13:2)

From the very beginning of Paul's life—and of time itself—God had planned to call him and make him an apostle of Christ. Again, this parallels the experience of Jeremiah and other OT prophets. God had set Jeremiah apart from his mother's womb, in order to serve as a prophet to God's people. (Jer. 1:4-10) Paul had received a very similar divine calling and commission—to serve God as an apostle to the Gentiles. This divine calling ensured, therefore, that Paul's apostolic office was authentic and authoritative. Paul occupied exactly the same position before God as any of the other apostles called before him.

Thus, in verses 2 and 3, Paul declared that God had set him apart for the gospel of God.

#### **Romans 1:2-3**

The gospel was not something newly thought up. Even in the Old Testament, God had made known the essential elements of the Gospel. This was the message of life that God had promised beforehand through his servants the prophets. These prophets had spoken of the coming Messiah, and had stimulated the people to set their hopes on the great deliverer whom God would send. (Rom. 3:21; Titus 1:2-3) Indeed, the LORD first announced the promise of the good news or gospel in Genesis. There, God declared that the seed of the woman (Christ) would bruise the serpent's (Satan's) head: i.e., there Christ is prophesied as destroying Satan's power and authority on earth—which he did at the cross. (Gen. 3:15; Col. 2:15)

From the time of Adam, and onward through Abraham, Moses and all the OT prophets, God promised redemption from sin through the coming Messiah. (Luke 24:26-27; Acts 10:43) The Messiah of whom the Holy Scriptures of the OT spoke was none less than the Son of God. Although eternally present with the Father, yet the Son would leave his Fa-

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ther's side, assume perfect human nature (i.e., sin apart) and accomplish the work of redemption.

The promised Messiah was to be the Son of God. According to the prophetic Scriptures, however, the Messiah was also to be a descendant of David. Jesus fulfilled both of these prophecies. Concerning his humanity, Jesus was a descendant of King David. (Luke 1:27) Concerning his divinity, he was and is King of kings and Lord of lords. He was and is the eternal Son of God—God manifest in human form. (Isa. 9:6-7)

### **Romans 1:4**

From the outset, God determined to demonstrate to the world that Jesus was his own unique Son. Thus, by his virgin birth, and by the Father's public attestation of Jesus' divinity and sonship at various periods of his life, God declared Jesus to be his own divine Son. (Luke 1:35; Matt. 3:17; see also Gal. 4:4)

By the almighty power of the Holy Spirit, God raised Jesus from the dead. By so doing, the Father again declared that Jesus was (and is) his own Son. Again, by raising Jesus from the dead, the Father expressed his absolute satisfaction with Christ's completed work of atonement on the sinner's behalf. (Acts 2:24,32) Thus, by the power of God Almighty, a full satisfaction was made for sins. Consequently, the gospel message of eternal salvation through faith in Christ could now be declared to all mankind.

Jesus Christ had proved himself to be the Saviour of all who believe. By his resurrection from the dead, he had also proved himself to be Sovereign Lord or Ruler over sin, death, the grave, and hell itself. Jesus was and is Lord of all. He is Lord especially of all those who believe on him and find salvation through his name. (Acts 4:10-12; 5:30-32)

### **Romans 1:5**

Through the risen and glorified Lord Jesus—and for the sake of his name—the apostles received their commission to preach the Gospel. Paul asserts that it was because of God's grace that he—and the other apostles—were now preaching Christ. The Lord Jesus had commanded them to make known his name to all mankind. Now they were engaged in fulfilling this ministry. The apostle, who once persecuted the church of God, now set about proclaiming the name of Christ among the Gentiles. (Rom. 15:15-17; 1 Tim. 1:12-17)

This former Pharisee had come to understand that the grace of God was not limited to the Jews. On the contrary, God was extending his grace to Jews and Gentiles—without discrimination. The message of the Gospel was a message of grace and salvation to all nations. From among all nations, the Holy Spirit was convicting men and women, challenging them of their sin and of their need of redemption. Consequently, many of these people had been turning to the Lord—humbly and obediently submitting to the call of the Gospel. All those who thus sought the Lord in true repentance and genuine faith found free and full forgiveness.

### **Romans 1:6**

Now, writes the apostle, God counts you believers at Rome among those whom he has called to himself. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, and through your humble submission to the terms of the Gospel, he has brought you into his eternal kingdom. In his grace, God opened your eyes to the truths of salvation. You saw the One who is the Light of the world and the Light of life, and you believed in this Light with all your heart and soul. You have been called—called to belong to Jesus Christ. Now, you are the children of God. Now, you are joint-heirs with Christ to a glorious inheritance. (2 Tim. 1:9-11; 1 Pet. 2:9)



### **Romans 1:7**

This letter is addressed to all of you at Rome. All of you are the beloved of God. God has called each one of you. He has made you a saint; i.e. a 'most holy one'. You have been set apart from the world to the service of your Lord and Master.

May you experience the fullness of God's unlimited grace. May his good will, his loving kindness, his favour and his mercy be yours in abundance. May he keep you in his grace and by his grace both now and evermore. May you also experience the indescribable peace of God in your hearts and lives—that peace which transcends all human understanding. May you know peace between your heavenly Father and yourselves always. May you also know peace and harmony between one another. May you experience the tranquillity of the Holy Spirit in your own lives and between your brothers and sisters in Christ.

No matter what happens, God will never remove his peace from us. So long as we walk with him, the sense of God's peace will never depart from us. Granted, sin, temptation and unfavourable circumstances at times may impede our fellowship with God. However, God will never ultimately remove the peace that he gives to his own beloved children.

God is our Father—our own heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ is his Son and our Lord. Because of Christ's atoning work on our behalf, God has reconciled us to himself for ever. From this atonement and this reconciliation, flows God's eternal peace. That is why this peace can never pass away: The blood that flowed from Calvary's mountain endures throughout the ages of the ages.

## **The Gospel Reveals God's Gift of Righteousness**

### **Romans 1:8**

Paul now proceeds to give thanks to God for these believers at Rome. Although he had never met them, he had heard about their intense love for God and their faith in God's one and only Son. So great was their commitment to Christ and his cause that their faith had been reported worldwide; i.e., throughout the known world (Rom. 16:19).

The Lord was richly blessing this church, even although they lacked local apostolic leadership. Clearly, the Holy Spirit must have equipped certain men within this church to minister to the needs of the people and to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the citizens of Rome.

### **Romans 1:9-10**

Here we see something of Paul's genuine concern for the churches of Christ. Although heavily committed to the churches throughout Asia Minor and beyond, he still makes time to pray for the believers at Rome. This prayerful intercession is not merely occasional, but a regular practice on the part of the apostle. Paul prays constantly on behalf of the saints in this city. Now, the apostle is praying that God might grant him the opportunity to visit these believers in person. With all the earnestness of his heart, Paul yearns for God to enable him to travel to Rome. Little does the apostle realise how God will bring him to Rome, or under what circumstances!

### **Romans 1:11-12**

Paul had been praying constantly for the believers at Rome. He longed eagerly to meet his brothers and sisters in this part of Italy, and to become acquainted with those who were so dear to his heart.

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In verse 11, Paul says he hopes to be able to impart some spiritual gift (or blessing) to them when eventually they meet. However, in verse 12, the apostle modifies this remark to make it plain that he expected not only to give, but also to receive, some spiritual blessing—that they may be mutually blessed in their fellowship with Christ.

### **Romans 1:13**

Paul wishes the Roman believers to be fully aware of the fact that he has long desired to visit them. Indeed, he had planned to do this on a number of occasions. However, for one reason or another, the Lord had not permitted him to implement his plans at those times.

Paul's aim in visiting the church at Rome was that he might reap from among them a harvest of souls for Christ—just as he had from among the other Gentiles. This seems to imply that the church at Rome was comprised mainly of Gentile believers; although a sizeable number of Jewish Christians may also have been present.

If, indeed, Rome was a Gentile congregation primarily, this would make the church at Rome primarily Paul's responsibility. Although not founded by him, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles—whereas Peter was principally the apostle to the Jews. Yet, neither apostle laboured exclusively among one group or the other. Indeed, as Paul declares:

### **Romans 1:14**

Paul was under obligation to preach the gospel to everyone—whether Greek (or Gentile) or non-Greek (or Jew). Paul was principally the apostle to the Gentiles. Yet, the apostle was prepared to proclaim Christ wherever he was not already known—whether to Jews or to Gentiles.

Christ, of course, was already known at Rome. However, Paul seems to be contemplating a wider ministry than to the church itself. He is hoping to proclaim Christ to those still outside the church, whether Greeks or non-Greeks, whether wise or foolish. Regardless of a person's race, creed, colour, religion, education, or social standing, Paul was anxious to win that person for Christ. The apostle's one concern was that sinners of all kinds might come to experience the grace of God in Christ Jesus—just as he himself had. Thus, the apostle declares:

### **Romans 1:15**

Paul did not mean that he was going to preach the gospel to those already converted—although he would certainly minister God's Word to the saints at Rome. Rather, as the latter part of this chapter will show, Paul seems intent on preaching Christ to those in Rome (and elsewhere) who were yet enslaved by sin and sinful passions. The apostle desires with all his heart to bring the message of deliverance or salvation from sin's bondage and corruption. This message was the gospel that proclaimed forgiveness of sin through true godly repentance and genuine faith in Christ.

The glory of Christ as Redeemer is made known in the gospel—and as a herald of this gospel, the apostle Paul is intensely proud. Thus, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 1:16**

In saying that he is not ashamed of the gospel, Paul is declaring that there is absolutely nothing concerning Christ or his gospel that gives the apostle any reason to be ashamed. (Cf. Luke 9:26) In effect, Paul is saying that—far from being ashamed of this glorious gospel—he is honoured to be appointed a herald of the gospel, and proud to serve Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Throughout the world, many different religions and philosophies of men held sway. However, not one of these religions or philosophies could make a man right with God, or impart to him the forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Every one of them lacked the power to change a person's inward life, and create him spiritually anew. Not so, however, with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the only message that could indeed make a person right with God, and could impart to him forgiveness of sins and peace with God. The gospel could indeed change a person's inward life and create him spiritually anew—for the gospel was the power of God. It was the power of God, working through his Holy Spirit, to bring about the complete salvation of everyone who believed the gospel message. (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:4-5)

Since it was entirely the work of God, it could not fail to prove effective in the lives of all those who trusted in the Lord and who committed themselves wholeheartedly to God's one and only Son. Through him—and as a gift of God's free and sovereign grace—everyone who believed received the forgiveness of all sins, and a place among all those whom God's Spirit is sanctifying. No one was excluded. The gospel of eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ was—and is—to the Jew in the first instance, and then to the Gentile. Everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ—whether Jew or Gentile—receives from God full salvation and eternal life.

### **Justification is By Faith**

Paul wishes to say much more about this glorious gospel, and about the righteousness proclaimed by it. The apostle will indeed enlarge on this theme later in this letter. In the meantime, however, he summarise the nature of the gospel by declaring in verse 17:

#### **Romans 1:17**

The religions of the world do not speak of a righteousness that comes from God. Rather, if they speak of righteousness at all, they speak of a 'righteousness' that man can earn or merit by doing good works or by obeying the law. This is the kind of righteousness that God declares to be no better than filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6)

The kind of righteousness of which Paul speaks, however, is not in any way related to man's earned or inherent righteousness (so-called). Rather, the righteousness of which the apostle speaks—and which the gospel proclaims—is that perfect righteousness that comes from God above (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:9). This is not man's righteousness, but God's gift of righteousness to man. God imputes (or reckons) this righteousness to every truly repentant and believing sinner when he calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness, and seeks justification through faith in Christ.

This is the only kind of righteousness by which a person can be justified in the sight of God. Only those who possess this righteousness as a gift of God's grace, have the right to approach God or to call him their Father in heaven. This is the righteousness that God makes known in the gospel. It is made known when Christ is preached as crucified, buried, risen and coming again. It is made known when Christ's atoning and substitutionary sacrifice for sinners at Calvary is clearly proclaimed. A person receives this righteousness by his faith in that message: i.e., by faith in the person and work of Christ on his behalf, and by his wholehearted trust in Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord.

From beginning to end, then, justification is by faith—by faith alone—and this by the grace of God alone. Works or good deeds do not in any way contribute toward, or help maintain, a person's justification or state of righteousness with God. Rather, works or good deeds are the necessary fruit and evidence of a truly regenerated and sanctified life. When performed consistently from a regenerated heart and life, they prove that a person has been justified by God—once-for-all.

## Mankind is Without Excuse

### **Romans 1:18-23**

The Word of God has declared that righteousness or justification comes to a person as a gift of God's grace, and that it is received through faith alone in Christ alone. However, unless mankind can be shown their need of redemption and their need of righteousness from God, they will not seek God's righteousness. Unless the Holy Spirit brings them to realise the great danger of living without God and with unforgiven sin, they will not seek the Lord's mercy.

The apostle Paul, then, now begins to demonstrate that—until they experience God's forgiveness—all mankind abides under the just wrath and utter condemnation of God. Paul will show this—firstly, in relation to the Gentile or pagan, and then in relation to the Jew. Only when he has demonstrated this truth, will the apostle continue to speak of the righteousness from God. He will then also begin to discuss the atonement that God has provided for every truly repentant sinner, through faith in Christ.

First, however, the apostle will begin by illustrating the true moral state of fallen mankind. Thus, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 1:18**

When the Bible speaks of the anger or wrath of God, it is not speaking of a God who acts temperamentally, impetuously, or unjustly. Nor is it speaking of a God who seeks revenge on those who oppose his will. Divine wrath is one of God's holy and righteous attributes.

God's wrath is not subject to fluctuation or change, nor is it anything less than an expression of his holy, righteous and perfect anger. God's wrath is the constant outpouring of his righteous judgment upon sin, and against all those who wilfully continue in the practice of sin. The fact that verse 18 tells us that God's wrath *'is being revealed'* indicates very clearly the sustained or ongoing nature of God's righteous judgment upon sinful mankind.

The more godless and wicked a man or woman becomes, the more they experience the wrath of God in their lives. The sin—which initially they may love and cherish—eventually turns bitter and wears them down. Ultimately, sin brings misery and ruin. Thus, the punishment of sin is yet more sin, together with its ruinous consequences. This is just one of the effects of God's wrath in the lives of impenitent men and women.

In addition to incurring the just wrath of God in this present life, however, the impenitent sinner must also incur the unending wrath of God in the life to come. Only by true repentance and genuine faith in Christ, can he be delivered from the dreadful destiny that awaits him in the torments of hell.

Verse 18 also tells us that—by their godless and wicked lifestyles or practices—men and women suppress the truth: i.e. the truth concerning God. This implies quite clearly that these people are acting against better knowledge. They know that God exists, and that he condemns their sins and iniquities. However, because they do not wish to acknowledge God in their lives, or submit to him, they make pretence of denying his existence. They attempt to explain him away, or they presume to sit in judgment on the One who will one day sit in judgment upon them.

Their judgment is magnified, however, because they not only suppress the truth as it relates to them, but also as it relates to others. They do all in their power to distort the truths of God's revelation in nature or creation. They do this in order to persuade others that the origin of the universe is not a signal demonstration of God's almighty power and glory, but rather the result of natural and impersonal occurrences.

Thus, on these grounds too, these people incur the just wrath of God. Destitute of any real reverence for God, these are ungodly and wicked individuals. In addition, they attempt to make others as wicked as they are themselves, by inducing them to adopt their own godless and evil opinions and practices. In Paul's day, this involved the worship of idols with all its associated evils. In our day, it involves the deification of man, the practice of humanism and secularism, and the disregard of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This, however, is another form of idolatry: For it is the commitment to a person or ideal other than the Lord our God.

As has been suggested, the fact that these impious and evil individuals suppressed the truth about God clearly intimates that they had some prior knowledge of God and of what he required. The apostle Paul confirms this when he writes:

**Romans 1:19**

Yes, they knew about God. They knew what they were doing when they suppressed the truth about God—the truth concerning his power and divine nature, which God reveals in his creation. They also knew what they were doing when they sought to prevent others from seeing God's power and glory in the natural creation. Again, they knew what they were doing when they denied that God was the Creator of the universe—preferring instead to worship idols or ideals of their own making.

In the same way, those people today who attempt to discredit or belittle the teachings of the Bible know what they are doing. God, however, will judge them accordingly.

These people knew—because, as verse 19 says,

*19a what may be known about God is plain to them... (NIV)*

Who had made it plain to them? God had made it plain to them. None other than the Almighty God himself had made plain to the minds and hearts of these people everything that was necessary to know concerning his existence, power and glory. (Ps. 19:1-6; Isa. 40:26)

To this end, the apostle adds:

**Romans 1:20**

God reveals himself to all mankind through his natural creation (natural revelation). Ever since the creation of the world, the LORD God had been revealing something of his existence, and of his eternal power and divine nature, in the things he had made.

From observing the created world, therefore, all mankind knew that God existed. They knew that he possessed almighty power and glory. This much God clearly revealed to them through his natural creation. It was folly indeed, then, and wilful rebellion, to deny that God had created the universe, or to attempt to attribute its origin to natural causes alone. This was the very sin of which these people were guilty—godlessness or a denial of God's existence, and a turning to alternative ideals or objects of worship. In other words, by rejecting the truth about God, they became committed to various forms of delusions or lying vanities—lying vanities that led them to idolatry.

This, however, is the very class of sin that humanity is repeating today. When men and women cling to a philosophy, theory or ideal that denies the involvement of a Sovereign Creator, Provider and Redeemer, they are rejecting God and committing themselves to idols. In this case, they are turning to the worship of fallen, sinful mankind and his humanistic philosophies or ideals. However, by so doing, these people are wilfully refusing to acknowledge that the creation of the universe is a demonstration of God's existence and of his sovereign power and glory.

What does God's Word say of such people?

First, it repudiates any pretended claims to ignorance in these matters (e.g. by taking refuge in atheism, agnosticism or pseudo-science). Rather, God's Word firmly declares that all nations clearly understood the truths concerning God's invisible qualities: i.e. his eternal power and divine nature. This is because God displayed that truth unmistakably in his creation.

Except by a wilful closing of his mind to the truth of God and his Word, a person could not fail to understand these realities. However, this is precisely what he did. In deliberate rebellion against God's revelation of himself in the natural creation—or against the testimony of God's Word, the Bible—sinful mankind refused to acknowledge the very truths that God had made plain to them. Instead, they set about trying to invent new 'truths' which their sinful minds would find more acceptable, and more comfortable to live with.

However, what does God's Word say of those who clearly understand—and yet reject—God's truths? Again, in verse 20, it says that,

*20b... men are without excuse.* (NIV)

They have no excuse for their actions or attitudes. However, by departing from God's truths, and seeking to establish their own distorted form of truth, they justly incur God's wrath and judgment. In addition, or as part of this punishment, God allows their mind to become confused or confounded, so that they are no longer capable of comprehending truth. Such a situation prevails, at least unless and until they are prepared to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, and his truth in their hearts and lives.

To this end, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 1:21**

There can be no question about the Gentiles not knowing God. It is true that—unlike the Jews—the Gentiles did not have God's special revelation in Scripture. However, this was absolutely no excuse for professing ignorance of God, or for their godless and impious lifestyles. Even although the Gentile nations did not have the Scriptures, God had still revealed himself to them through his creation. In addition, God had made himself known to them through their conscience and through historical events when the LORD's almighty and sovereign hand was clearly seen.

Such events included the deluge in the days of Noah, which God brought upon the world for its extreme wickedness and violence. They included the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for its homosexual and other immoral practices. They included the plagues brought upon Egypt for its rebellion against God in refusing to release the Hebrew people from the land of slavery. They also included many other situations throughout history. (Gen. 6:1ff; 19:24-25; Exodus 7:1ff)

In the light of the evidence, no one could deny the existence of a supreme and all-powerful God. They could only reject the God to whom the evidence so clearly pointed—and this is what they did. However, by rejecting the only true God, the Gentiles were refusing to give God the glory, or to submit to and worship his majestic and holy Name. They were refusing to acknowledge the only true God as their Creator, their Sovereign and their Judge.

Again, they refused to give thanks to God for all the blessings that he had bestowed upon them daily. This included the blessing of life itself, together with the blessings of fruitful seasons, of rain, sun, and many other gifts of God's providence and common grace. In fact, instead of praising and thanking God for all these things, they attributed such bless-

ings to their idols and began worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:16-17; 17:23-31)

Why did this happen to these people? Because, as verse 21 makes plain,

*21b ...their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* (NIV)

God had created mankind in his own image: i.e., not only as a physical or biological being, but also as a being with a truly rational, moral and spiritual nature or soul (these latter qualities being the image of God in man). However, when mankind rebels against and rejects his Creator, he also rebels against and rejects his Creator's moral and spiritual standards for his life. When men and women set aside God's holy standards, God's infallible and unchanging truth and righteousness no longer guide their minds. Ultimately, this results in the adoption of relative standards of belief and behaviour. Effectively, this means that their minds begin to condone, or even approve of, the practice of sin. However, this is the very thing that God's standard of righteousness condemns, and which a person of morally and spiritually sound mind would repudiate.

When a person continues on this downhill slide, his thinking eventually becomes confused and ultimately futile. The rational processes of his mind become so distorted by the acceptance of sin that the person is no longer able to discriminate clearly between that which is morally right and that which is morally wrong. Thus, he often approves of what God condemns, and condemns those things that God approves. (Eph. 4:17-19) His inability, however, to distinguish clearly between right and wrong, affords him absolutely no excuse in God's eyes. He is wholly responsible for his condition, since he brought it upon himself by his rejection of God and his holy laws.

All of this proceeds from a heart (or mind, or inward being) darkened by sin. This, therefore, is mankind's ultimate folly—or moral deficiency—in relation to God. By rejecting God in his life, and repudiating God's righteous standards, his whole inward being has become a pit of darkness, and the source of his moral and spiritual corruption. His entire thought processes have become essentially futile in their outlook.

This does *not* mean that the entire Gentile world has reached the same state of moral and spiritual depravity. Nor does it mean that they are wholly incapable of doing, saying and thinking anything morally good. However, it *does* mean that their innate sinful nature has corrupted their entire heart, soul and mind. Consequently, nothing they think, say or do is acceptable to God. Indeed, to a greater or lesser degree, unforgiven sin contaminates everything they think, say or do. This, however, does not prevent some such individuals from presuming to be well informed in moral and spiritual matters—or even to be qualified to sit in judgment upon God himself!

What does God's Word say about such worldly and godless wisdom? Paul writes:

### **Romans 1:22-23**

Many of these godless Gentiles made much of their worldly wisdom and learning. They had become experts in this or that field of learning or knowledge. But all their worldly wisdom and learning could not aid them in relation to moral and spiritual realities, or to the ultimate purpose of their lives, or of the creation of the universe in which they lived. Unable and unwilling to see the hand of God in the lives of all mankind, they became 'fools'. In the Bible, the word 'fool' often signifies one who is morally deficient, or lacking in the knowledge of God. (1 Cor. 1:19-21; 3:18-20)

Today, such a person often sees himself as a product of evolutionary processes alone, and not as one originally created in the image of God. Often, this is because he fears the judgment of God in his life, and thus tries to deny God's existence by denying the need of

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a Sovereign Creator. However, where does this attitude lead him? Verse 23 tells us that—in their extreme folly—they,

*23a ...exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images... (NIV)*

They exchange the glory of God Most High for images... They forget that they themselves have been created in the true image of God, and they fall down and worship images of wood and stone! (Cf. Ps. 106:20-21; Jer. 2:11) Only a mind distorted by sin could turn from the glory of the immortal God to the shame of sensual idolatry. Nevertheless, such is the way of sinful mankind.

This demonstrates very clearly that mankind did not *ascend* from a lower to a higher state of existence. On the contrary, Scripture, experience, and history itself shows unmistakably that man has *descended*—or *fallen*—from a state of original righteousness to a state of moral and spiritual depravity. This has happened as a result of mankind's sinfulness, godlessness and folly.

They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...

However, of what kind of images is Paul speaking?

Verse 23 continues:

*23c ...images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (NIV)*

The Gentiles refused to believe in the reality, power and divine nature of the one true God. Yet, in their folly, they believed in the reality, power and supposed divinity of their man-made idols! By their own hands, they had carved out these images in the form of men and women, or in the form of birds, animals, reptiles or other creatures. Furthermore, they sacrificed before these images, they worshipped before them, they prayed to them for assistance in their daily lives and in their work. (Isa. 44:9-20)

Others, in their foolishness, looked to the stars for help. They set their hopes in the sun, moon and other planetary bodies, and in the signs of the constellations. They sought guidance in all significant matters from these sources. (Jer. 8:2)

All these things were utterly powerless to act on mankind's behalf—yet these were the gods that mankind, in his wisdom, saw fit to worship.

Not everyone resorted to such extreme forms of superstition, paganism or idolatry. Then, as well as now, sizeable segments of the Gentile world thought themselves above such things. However, even these more sophisticated Gentiles worshipped gods of their own making. For some, this was the humanistic philosophies of the ages. For others, it was the pursuit of knowledge as the key to answering life's entire question and satisfying every human need and desire. Thus, mankind exalted the ideas and philosophies of men above the truth of God. They gloried not in God, but in men and in mankind's achievements. They set their hopes not on the Rock of Ages, but on the shifting sands of theoretical science, idealism, humanism and secularism.

These represent just a few of the more sophisticated false gods which mankind cherishes in his heart. Others include materialism (greed) and the virtual glorification and worship of sex. These represent some of the 'gods' of this age and of this present generation. This is what happens to a person when he exchanges the glory of the immortal God for man's ungodly ideals, theories, and standards of human behaviour.

### **God Abandons to Their Sin, Those Who Abandon Him**

What, however, is the outcome of those who choose to follow this path? Paul answers this question in the following verses:



**Romans 1:24-32**

In three separate passages below, the apostle Paul declares what happens to those who reject the truth about God, and who choose to follow their own godless ways. In each of these passages—beginning respectively at verses 24, 26 and 28—the Scripture reveals that God abandons these people to their own sin and its consequences.

Thus, the apostle writes:

**Romans 1:24**

This is a classic consequence of refusing to acknowledge God. Those who choose to live without God are ultimately given over by God to the sinful desires of their own hearts or minds. Whatever they may cherish or yearn for in their hearts becomes their 'god'—the true object of their affections. (Ps. 81:11-12)

For many, the longing of their heart is for sexual relations. However, they do not seek such relations in the way that God intended: i.e. through the sacred bond of marriage. Rather, they seek sexual satisfaction through a variety of impure and immoral situations. (Eph. 4:18-19) Such, for example, are those who engage in sexual promiscuity. Such, too, are those who distort or pervert the gift of sex by indulging in unnatural practices. They do this instead of enjoying sex as God intended.

Principally, God intended sexual relations to act as a unique gift that bonded a husband and his wife together as one flesh, or one unique person. In addition, it was God's intention for every married couple that—through sexual relations—they should be enabled to fulfil one another's important emotional, physical and psychological needs. Thus, sexual intimacy was intended to be one means whereby a husband and his wife could express their love and affection for one another. And, of course, one expression of their mutual love was the God-ordained plan for human reproduction and new life. Thus, in every respect, God intended sexual relations within marriage to be a joy and a blessing from him.

In verse 24, however, Paul refers to those who distort and abuse God's gift, to engage in unnatural practices. In saying this, we should note that—at this stage—Paul is not referring to homosexual practices. The apostle will deal with such practices in subsequent verses. Rather, in verse 24, Paul is speaking of those men and women who degrade their bodies with one another by engaging in some form of sexually immoral behaviour.

In Paul's day, this included those who perverted or abused the gift of sex by engaging in things like pagan sexual rites and ceremonies, or cultic prostitution. This practice was rife in cities like Corinth from where the apostle was writing. In the temple of Aphrodite alone, over a thousand priestesses acted as sacred cult prostitutes. Similar practices were pursued in other parts of the Greek world. And, in the Roman world, sexual immorality was practised in connection with the cult goddess, Venus.

Again, in many other places—now, as well as then—men and women employ some form of perverted sexual ritual in the worship of pagan deities or demons. In addition, those who engage in any form of sexual relations outside of marriage, or with anyone other than their marriage partner, are abusing and distorting the gift of God. Yet, such abuse is practised widely today—as it was in Paul's day. People indulge in sexual immorality with partners to whom they are not married (or not yet married). (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 1 Thess. 4:3-8)

When people persist in this course—repeatedly, wilfully and stubbornly refusing to repent of and renounce their sin—God eventually gives them over to their impurity; i.e. to the degrading of their bodies with one another. Since God has abandoned them to their sin, he has also abandoned them to the consequences of their sin. Whatever illnesses, diseases

or other evils come upon them as a direct result of their sexual impurity, are illnesses, diseases or evils that otherwise might have been avoided.

We should be careful to note, of course, that many illnesses or diseases do not relate directly to a person's sinful lifestyle. Rather, they relate more generally to the fall of man, and to the sinful nature and inclinations common to all mankind. (Luke 13:2-5; John 9:1-3) Whatever the cause, we must be careful not to pass judgment, lest we ourselves be judged by God. God alone knows the truth, and he alone will judge each person justly and fairly—and yet with mercy and compassion.

Then, the apostle adds:

### **Romans 1:25**

The Gentiles rejected the truth concerning the existence, power and divine nature of God. However, when a person rejects ultimate truth—i.e. God's truth—he must inevitably resort to a lie. Such a person must deceive himself concerning the evidence that God has set before his eyes in respect of his existence and power. That person must substitute other (imagined) realities in place of God—for God constituted mankind as spiritual beings. As such, men and women possess a spiritual nature—no matter how much they may try to suppress it or deny its existence.

Instead, however, of accepting the truth concerning the all-powerful and Sovereign God of all creation, mankind in his folly substitutes false gods. He invents 'gods' which are, in reality, the products of his own distorted and sin-darkened mind. For the truth of God, he substitutes the philosophies and ideas of men. He sets his heart on them, and serves them with his mind and understanding. (Cf. Matt. 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17)

The pagan worships idols—but idols are non-existent entities, frequently used as a front to conceal the worship of demons. As for philosophies and ideas or ideals, they are but the accumulation of mankind's knowledge and wisdom; i.e. *of fallen and sinful* mankind's knowledge and wisdom. But how can the knowledge and wisdom of fallen and sinful mankind compare with the infinite, holy and perfect knowledge and wisdom of mankind's Creator? Yet, they choose to worship the things that God has created—including man's mind and intellect—rather than the One who created all these things.

But should not God the Creator be the only object of adoration, praise and worship? Indeed, he should. Moreover, as Paul contemplates the greatness and the majesty of the Creator, the apostle exclaims at the end of verse 25:

*25c [God] ...who is for ever praised. Amen. (NIV)*

Sinful men and women may not praise the Name of the Lord while they remain in their woefully darkened state of mind. One day, however, every knee will bow before him. However, those whom God has delivered from such darkness and moral impurity by his sovereign grace and mercy will certainly praise and worship his most holy Name.

Again, myriads of holy angels—superior by far to any human being in power, glory and intellect—worship, praise and magnify the Name of the Lord. These higher created intelligences acknowledge, worship and serve their Creator. How much more should mankind, who depends for his very existence on the presence, sustaining power and providence of God? No wonder Paul concludes verse 25 with an Amen—so be it! Or truly let it be!

Nevertheless, what becomes of those who wilfully persist in setting their hearts on idols, or on the unbridled pursuit of sexually immoral practices? What happens to those who change the truth of God for a lie (or the lie of denying his existence, power and glory)? What happens to those who deliberately choose to 'worship' and serve the creation (including philosophy, science and false religions) instead of the Creator?

Paul tells us of the dreadful consequences of this way of life. The apostle writes:

**Romans 1:26**

Sinful men and women chose to reject the revelation of God in the natural creation. Instead, they set up false gods, or deceptive ideologies, in their hearts and minds. For this reason, God eventually abandoned them to their shameful and degrading lusts and passions. Their rejection of God's truth had led them—by degrees—to adopt lower and lower standards of morality and ethics. Eventually, it became permissible to practice any kind of sexual deviation or perversion that the heart desired—and even to approve of such practices in others (v.32).

This was the situation in the days when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, together with the cities of the plain. (Gen. 19:5,12-13,24-25; see also Judges 19:22; Jude 7) It was also a very common situation in Paul's day—especially among the Greeks and Romans. Again, it was a situation that prevailed in many subsequent generations, and which prevails in our own day and generation.

The apostle Paul, of course, is referring to the practice of homosexuality. In verse 26, he is referring to female homosexuality or 'lesbianism'. In verse 27—which we will be considering shortly—Paul is referring to male homosexuality. In both verses, the apostle is showing that homosexual practices are, in fact, one form of punishment for a person's wilful and repeated rejection of God and of his standards of moral behaviour.

Homosexuality is just one of the shameful lusts by which God condemns and punishes those who indulge their sinful passions without restraint, and without regard to God's law. Homosexual practices between females (lesbianism)—which are what we are considering in verse 26—are totally unnatural and utterly abhorrent to God. The fact that many people find such practices acceptable, or tolerable, demonstrates just how far we, as a nation, have departed from the truths of God's Word. However, we must ever remember that—as with certain other sins—God has abandoned those who engage in lesbian relationships. The Lord has given them up to this form of corruption and vice as a punishment for their repudiation of his truth regarding such matters.

The same, of course, is true of those men who practice homosexual relations with other men. Paul now refers to this category:

**Romans 1:27**

Homosexual men find themselves in precisely the same moral and spiritual position before God as their lesbian counterparts. When they persistently continue in the practice of their sin, God eventually abandons them to the corruption of that sin and to all the evil consequences that their cherished sin brings upon them.

This is their punishment for abandoning God and his truth. This is their punishment for rejecting the God-ordained natural relationship with members of the opposite sex. Men lust uncontrollably after other men. They commit indecent and degrading acts with other men. Consequently, they receive in their own persons the due penalty for their perverted and unnatural behaviour. (1 Kings 14:24)

From this we can see, therefore, that God's Word utterly condemns homosexual practices in any form. According to the Word of God, it is a wholly unnatural vice, and completely contrary to God's plan for sexual relations between a male and a female. The latter carries God's highest approval, blessing and commendation. The former carries God's greatest disapproval, curse, and condemnation. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18,22-24; Lev. 18:22,24-25; 20:13)

Thus, too, it should be evident that no church authority or civil government has the right to change what God has said about such matters. No church teaching or authoritative declaration, and no government opinion or law has the right to set aside or overturn what God's Word says in relation to homosexual practices. In God's Word, such practices are unambiguously condemned.

Therefore, let those who desire to help homosexuals, advise them (with great compassion) that they are sinning against God. Let them explain to them clearly, but with genuine concern, that they are presently under God's righteous judgment (as indeed are all unrepentant and unforgiven sinners). Let them tell homosexuals that God loves them, and that Christ died for their sins. Let them encourage such people to acknowledge and confess their sins to God, and utterly to renounce the practise of their sin. If, by the grace of God, they are constrained to seek his mercy and forgiveness, they will most certainly find his mercy and forgiveness. God will receive them, cleanse them, and make them his very own sons and daughters through faith in Christ.

We can state these things with all authority and with complete confidence, because—in this matter, as in all matters spiritual—we derive that authority and confidence directly from the infallible and unchangeable Word of God. In this instance, the Word of God makes it abundantly plain that among those forgiven and received into the church at Corinth were some who had previously been practising homosexuals. They had pursued this unnatural and immoral way of life until—by God's grace and mercy—he had redeemed and cleansed them through repentance and faith, and by the blood of the Lamb. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

It should go without saying that what applies to practising homosexuals applies also to those with homosexual inclinations or tendencies, but who do not engage in any homosexual practices. These people, too, are included in God's offer of mercy. God acknowledges and approves of the fact that they have kept themselves from the practise of sin. This, in itself, will not save them. This is partly because salvation must include deliverance from a person's sinful thoughts and attitudes, as well as from his sinful acts or practises. However, God takes note of their self-control, and he esteems them highly on this account.

Regardless of their sexual orientation—whether real or imagined—God loves them. In the same way in which he receives any truly repentant sinner, he will receive them. He will forgive them of all sin—including sins of the mind or heart—and grant to them the gift of eternal life. The possibility that they may continue to have homosexual tendencies or inclinations will not, in itself, exclude them from God's love or from God's eternal kingdom. One day, God will remove all sinful inclinations from each of our lives—and all of us have some type of sinful inclination or another. However, for those who have homosexual tendencies, they must be extremely careful to avoid any situation that would tempt them to sin. In addition, of course—as Christians—they must never engage in any form of homosexual practises.

This principle, of course, applies to every form of temptation to sin. Every one of us has a particular weak point in our lives. Therefore, we must all do our utmost to avoid the kind of situations that exploit our weaknesses and expose us to temptation—whatever form that temptation may take.

Again, as Christians, we must never engage in any sinful practises of any description. Yet, even here, God makes provision for those of us who, at times, fall into sin. Upon acknowledging and confessing our sin to God, the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin and restores us to fellowship with him. (1 John 1:6 - 2:2)

We must not imagine, however, that it is only because of sexually immorality and perversion that God abandons people to their sins and its consequences. The same applies to

every other kind of sinful practise or attitude. Thus, in illustration of the kind of reasons why God gives people over to their sins, the apostle Paul writes:

### **Romans 1:28**

In addition to, or rather because of, their godlessness and wickedness, God gives these people over to a depraved mind. Because they do not think it worth their while to recognise God, or to retain any knowledge of his existence, power and glory, God abandons them to moral and spiritual depravity (vv. 18,21). This does not mean that everyone is, or becomes, thoroughly depraved. However, everyone is, or becomes, thoroughly polluted in body and soul (including their mind) by their rejection of God and of his holy and righteous standards of behaviour.

The more involved a person becomes in his sin, the more morally, spiritually—and often physically—polluted he becomes. Thus, sin becomes that person's punishment, leading him or her ultimately to moral, spiritual—and perhaps mental and/or physical—degradation and ruin. (Prov. 1:29-32; Rom. 6:23; cf. Gal. 6:7-8)

As has been noted earlier, these consequences do not apply only to those who engage in sexually immoral or perverted practices. Eventually, such repercussions become true of every type of persistent and impenitent sinner. Paul illustrates this truth when he writes:

### **Romans 1:29a,b**

Once God abandons a person to his or her sin, that person eventually becomes filled with a range of sinful attitudes, inclinations and habits. Sin, and sinful thoughts, dominate and overwhelm their godless minds. Ultimately, this can lead them to the unrestrained practise of evil deeds. Verse 29a,b (NIV) says that—eventually—these godless people become filled with some, at least, of the following sins:

*Wickedness:* They are filled with wickedness or unrighteousness of heart and life. Wickedness is essential badness of a person's inward nature, or an absence of moral and spiritual values. It is often accompanied by a disregard for law and justice. It may be accompanied by a morally warped mind.

*Evil:* They are filled with evil or the deliberate intention to cause harm or to indulge in iniquity, and to encourage others to do the same. They are strenuously opposed to God and to everything that is essentially good and true. (Compare the expression, the Evil [one] (i.e., Satan) as the adversary of God and man.)

*Greed:* They are filled with greed, or all manner of covetous and selfish desires. Dissatisfied with what they have, they are ever seeking more. The cry of the greedy or covetous is more, more, more! Greed is another form of idolatry, since it involves the love of, and commitment of one's heart to the pursuit of, ungodly objects or aims.

*Depravity:* Ultimately, they become filled with depravity, or a morally perverse nature and personality. Such a personality is completely dominated by sinful attitudes, desires and passions.

*Envy:* They are filled with envy, or a sinful and jealous regard to what belongs to others. Alternatively, they desire to attain to the same level of success or achievement as others. In this case, envy may be closely related to selfish ambition.

*Murder:* They harbour lingering grudges in their hearts, followed ultimately by hatred, and then by murderous thoughts. Frequently, this leads them to commit violence against other people, or even to the act of murder itself.

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*Strife*: Their minds become filled with inward strife, dissension or conflict, and they demonstrate their strife toward other people by an argumentative and hostile attitude.

*Deceit*: They are filled with lies, deceit, and dishonest and fraudulent practises. Deceit may also include craftiness, subtlety or guile.

*Malice*: They demonstrate a malicious or evil attitude toward those who oppose them, disagree with them, or who—in their estimation—have done them some kind of wrong.

Paul continues with this dreadful catalogue of evil:

### Romans 1:29c-30

*Gossips*: they secretly whisper evil accusations against other people, very often distorting the truth in the process—or, even worse, without any shred of real evidence for their malicious reports. Thus, gossip can cause unfounded rumours to be spread, and these rumours can be extremely hurtful and harmful to innocent parties. Such is the evil of idle gossip. (Prov. 16:28; 26:20)

*Slanderers*: slanderers are those who speak openly against someone. They accuse them falsely of some wrongdoing, or they attempt to discredit a person's character or reputation by making evil or scurrilous remarks against him or her. When it appears in written or printed form, slander is known as *libel*. When evil remarks are directed against God, slander is known as *blasphemy*.

*God-haters*: Not surprisingly, those who speak evil of God's creation (mankind) speak evil of God himself. In their wickedness and depravity, they not only accuse God of injustice and wrongdoing, but they hate him in their hearts. This, at least, is a clear admission on their part that—despite their denials to the contrary—they concede that God exists, and that he will one day judge them. For a person cannot hate a non-existent being. Nor, having accepted the reality of God's existence, can a person deny that God will one day judge him in righteousness on account of his sins and iniquities.

*Insolent*: many of these people are characterised by an insolent and proud nature. They know nothing of humility. Rather, they assert themselves—often using forceful or verbally abusive language in an attempt to gain their objectives, or to achieve their own selfish ambitions.

*Arrogant*: The arrogant person is very closely related to the insolent individual, and indeed both characteristics are frequently combined. He employs many of the same tactics as the insolent person, but—in addition—he may be more loud-mouthed or boastful.

*Boastful*: The boastful person is often both insolent and arrogant—but not invariably so. Those who are boastful like to trumpet their own achievements. They like to take pride in their own sinful conquests. The boastful person wants everyone else to know how successful they have been, thus they boast of their selfish achievements or their evil deeds.

*They invent ways of doing evil*: Not content with practising all the usual forms of evil behaviour, these depraved people set about trying to discover or invent new ways of committing sinful acts. They practise their evil deeds from a different angle, or they indulge themselves in yet more depraved activities—encouraging others to join them in their new-found perversions.

Society reaches such a state of moral and spiritual decadence and depravity when it rejects God and teaches godless philosophies to its children. Men and women exacerbate the situation further when they disregard and despise family values, or when governments enact and implement ungodly and iniquitous laws. No nation can continue to stand when it

endeavours to stand against God, or ignore his existence. Ultimately, it must fall—and fall it certainly will, unless it repents and turns back to God.

One of the outcomes of godlessness and indiscipline within a family and nation is disrespect shown by children to their parents. Thus, in verse 30, the apostle Paul says of such children,

*They disobey their parents:* They refuse to accept their parent's instructions and discipline. They rebel against parental authority. In course of time, some of these same children—now grown to adulthood—refuse to accept authority and discipline as expressed in the laws of the land. They despise the rule of law or the enactments of the civil government. This is one of the factors that may contribute toward the ultimate breakdown of society, together with its laws and institutions. It may even lead to the collapse of national unity—unless steps are taken in time to restore caring love and godly discipline in the home, and throughout society.

In verse 31, Paul lists some further effects in the lives of those people whom God abandons to their sins and its consequences:

### **Romans 1:31**

*Senseless:* They behave foolishly or mindlessly. They fail to exercise common sense or rational judgment, but respond principally to their emotions and especially to the thoughts and desires of their carnal or fleshly nature. They lack understanding and discretion. They are insensitive to the needs and sensitivities of others. In its extreme form, senselessness may imply moronic state of mind. (Prov. 18:2; Jer. 4:22)

*Faithless:* They are unfaithful to one another, untrustworthy or disloyal. They may be treacherous, unreliable and undependable. In relation to God, faithlessness includes unbelief, lack of faith, scepticism and wilful spiritual adultery or apostasy from God. This involves a turning to irreligious and impious ways.

*Heartless:* Those who are heartless are unfeeling, uncaring and unkind. Heartlessness also includes those who are cold- or hard-hearted, or who are untouched or unmoved by human suffering and distress. It includes those who are stern and pitiless. They lack natural affection, and they stifle normal human emotions.

*Ruthless:* Those who are ruthless lack mercy and compassion. They can be unforgiving and unsparing in their attitude toward others. In its more extreme form, ruthlessness can be exhibited by a cruel, vicious or brutal nature. In its most extreme form, ruthlessness may result in savagery and other forms of extreme violence.

Such, then, is the most dreadful state of those whom God abandons to the consequences of their own sins—because they refused to acknowledge God or give him the glory. Not everyone reaches the more extreme forms of moral and spiritual depravity, but everyone without exception is guilty of at least several of the sins listed above (ch. 3:9-18; 2 Tim. 3:1-8).

However, does fallen and rebellious mankind acknowledge his sin and guilt, or the fact that God has justly condemned him for his unbelief and iniquity? By no means! On the contrary, fallen mankind increases their sin and guilt by inciting others to follow their evil example of godlessness and unrighteousness. Thus, Paul writes:

### **Romans 1:32**

Here we see the real truth of the matter: Although these sinful individuals have denied God's existence, yet—in their hearts—they know full well that God exists. They know too that God's righteous decrees condemn their evil behaviour. Even without the written Word

of God, they are fully aware—from the constitution of their nature—that a holy and righteous God must judge their iniquitous behaviour and pronounce the death sentence upon them. (Even those who worship idols believe this much concerning their false gods!) (Vv. 19-21)

In this context, the fact that they deserve death does not refer exclusively or even principally to physical death—although this is included. Rather, it refers to spiritual death or alienation from God in this life (a sentence already implemented upon the ungodly). It also refers to eternal death or final separation from God for ever in the lake of fire (a sentence to be implemented in the future). Between these two comes physical death or the death of the body—at least until its resurrection for final judgment. (2 Thess. 1:8-9; cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-12)

Yet, although they are fully aware that they deserve death in all its forms, they continue to practise their sins. They do so without the slightest inclination to seek true repentance, and without any real sense of shame or guilt for their wicked deeds. Even worse, they encourage others to indulge in the same wicked attitudes and practises—and then commend them when they do. It is hard to imagine a more corrupt and degraded state of humanity. Yet, even in this state of degradation and ruin, it is not yet beyond redemption.

However, because of mankind's inherent depravity, he is in no fit condition either to earn or to contribute toward his own salvation. Thus, if he is to be saved, he must be saved by the sovereign grace and undeserved mercy of God. Fallen and spiritually dead mankind cannot earn his righteousness. Therefore, his only hope of salvation is to receive the righteousness that comes to him as a gift of God's grace. A person can receive God's gift only through faith in Christ and his atoning work on the sinner's behalf (vv. 16-17) Paul will discuss this subject in detail later in this letter. Meanwhile, however—and in chapter 2 of Romans—the apostle turns his attention from the wickedness of the heathen or Gentile nations to the wickedness of the Jews—and to the need of both groups for their redemption in Christ.



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## Romans Chapter 2

### No-one Can Escape God's Judgment

#### **Romans 2:1-11**

##### **Romans 2:1**

Having just heard of the dreadful catalogue of sins practised by the ungodly, someone might be inclined to agree wholeheartedly with God's condemnation of them. Such a person may even join with God in passing judgment upon these sinful men and women. This could be true of either those Gentiles who considered themselves above such depths of depravity, and untouched by such moral degradation. However, the later context of this chapter suggests that this judgmental attitude be understood primarily of the Jews. It could just as well be true, however, of any one of us who passed judgment on others. By so doing, we would be passing judgment and condemnation on ourselves.

We may not think ourselves guilty of such gross sins as the ungodly Gentiles or idolatrous pagans. Nevertheless, every one of us has the same sinful nature, and therefore the same potential to commit any or all of these sins. This includes even the most immoral, the most perverted or the most heinous offences. Only the grace of God keeps us from descending to such a dreadful state of iniquity and depravity, and only God's grace enables us to withstand temptation to sin.

Yet, we must remember that, often, we ourselves think of committing sin—and may even cherish it—in our hearts or minds. However, in God's sight, these sins of the heart are just as evil and morally polluting to our soul as those sins committed openly and shamelessly by the ungodly nations. This is why, in verse 1, Paul says that at whatever point we judge others we condemn ourselves. This is because we who pass judgment do—or are capable of doing—the very same things. (Matt. 7:1-5)

The word translated 'do' in this verse, is the same word rendered 'practise' in verse 32 of chapter 1. Paul is saying that we too are guilty of at least some of these wicked attitudes, inclinations and practices. Thus, neither the Jew—nor we—have the moral right to pass judgment on others. This applies no matter how vile or offensive we consider a person's sin to be. (2 Sam. 12:5-7)

God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but to save the world. If the Son of God does not judge sinners, we dare not. (John 3:17; 12:47) The Day of Judgment will surely come. However, on that Day, the Lord will be the Righteous Judge—and he will judge each one of us according to truth, and as our deeds deserve. To this end, Paul writes in verse 2:

##### **Romans 2:2**

The only person competent to know the heart and mind, and to judge accordingly, is the Lord God himself—through Jesus Christ his Son. Yes, God will certainly judge everyone for the evils they have committed, and for the good they have omitted to do. God will judge them, however, on the basis of truth: i.e. with regard to the true state of each case—and God alone knows a person's heart. This does not mean that God will excuse the unrighteous. Nevertheless, it does mean that he will judge them fairly, justly, and in accordance with the light granted to them. (John 12:48; Acts 17:31; 2 Thess. 1:5-10)

It is for these reasons, among others, that no human being is competent to pass judgment on, or to condemn, his neighbour. Nor will the saints of God become competent to judge angels or the world, until they meet with the Lord in his glory and they themselves have been glorified.

(Paul's reference in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 to judging church matters refers to the exercise of church discipline. It has no connection with individual private judgment and condemnation (as in Romans 2). Nor does it have any connection with judgment that relates to a person's eternal destiny. Only God can pass such judgment on a person.)

In verse 3, Paul continues:

### **Romans 2:3**

How can fallen, sinful mankind—whose knowledge is finite—pass moral or spiritual judgment on his fellow human beings? He cannot—because, in one form or another, he is guilty of practising the very sins he would condemn in others. Again, if a person practises the very sins he condemns in other people, what makes him think that he can escape God's righteous judgment? God does not treat individuals with indifference. He judges each person as his deeds deserve (v.11).

No one, of course, can escape the righteous judgment of God—except by accepting the righteousness that God himself provides for the sinner through repentance and faith in his Son. However, to everyone who—like certain Jews—were depending on their own righteousness or religious connections (e.g., their descent from Abraham), and who rejected Christ's righteousness, they would most certainly not escape God's judgment.

In verse 4, Paul continues by asking:

### **Romans 2:4**

When a person judges or condemns others, or believes himself to be morally superior to others, he is showing disdain for God's grace. That person is passing judgment on others, while—at the same time—God is showing mercy to him. Out of the riches of his great kindness, tolerance and forbearance, God is withholding judgment from this person. Even although he is a sinner in God's sight, the Lord is prepared to show him abundant kindness.

Ultimately, however—if he remains impenitent to the last—he will be judged and condemned by God. However, in his grace, and while time for that person remains, the Lord continues to demonstrate mercy and kindness toward him. The Lord does this in order to lead the sinner to repentance, and hence to salvation (Rom. 10:12-13). This is the reason why such a person cannot judge or condemn others without showing contempt for God's kindness, tolerance and patience toward him.

However, do these 'morally superior' people—in this case, the Jews or others like them—seek the repentance of the Lord? Do they acknowledge his grace, mercy and patience toward them? Not so. On the contrary, they disregard the grace, mercy and patience of God—with potentially fatal consequences. Thus, in verse 5, the apostle Paul writes:

### **Romans 2:5**

Such 'morally superior' people will certainly not escape God's judgment. Indeed, by refusing to see themselves as sinners, and by their refusal to seek God's mercy, they are compounding God's judgment upon them. Again, by showing contempt for God's grace, mercy and kindness toward them, they are adding to their judgment. Yet, this is due to their stubborn and unrepentant heart. They do not see themselves as sinners in need of salva-

tion. Therefore, by continuing in their unrepentant and unbelieving ways, they are storing up—little by little—an ever-increasing amount of God's righteous wrath. (Zech. 7:11-13; Matt. 24:48-51)

When will God judge those who judge others? As with all unrepentant sinners, they are presently abiding under the wrath and judgment of God. In addition, however, to God's wrath and judgment in this life, there is a Day of Judgment and wrath yet to come. This is when every impenitent sinner—including the morally or self-righteous sinner—will be judged by God. On that Day, God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Matt. 16:27)

Concerning this final judgment, Paul writes in verse 6:

### **Romans 2:6**

{Cf. Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12}

Summarising the nature and extent of this judgment, the apostle begins by establishing the basis on which God will judge mankind: He will give to every person according to what he has done. Judgment will be according to a person's *actions* or *deeds*. This, however, will also take into account every motive and inclination of the heart, together with every secret thought and every idle word (v.16; Matt. 12:34-37; 1 Cor. 4:5).

The fact that God will judge each person according to his or her deed, thoughts and motives, does not contradict or compromise the message of salvation by grace through faith. Only the finally impenitent and unbelieving will be judged according to their deeds, and condemned as a result. Those who have believed on Christ will be judged according to their deeds—but *they will not be condemned*. This is because Christ has already borne the penalty due to them and has suffered the wrath of God in their stead. Thus, at the judgment seat of God, every true believer will be acquitted.

However, God will still judge the believer according to the way he has lived his new life in Christ Jesus. Based on this judgment, the Lord will reward him with greater degrees of blessing. In the case of unfaithfulness to the Lord or his service, a believer may lose some or all of this reward. He will not, however, lose his salvation. This is because God has granted salvation to him—not as a reward, nor as something earned—but as a free and sovereign gift of his grace. (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

In the next verse, Paul summarises the way of life and peace when he writes:

### **Romans 2:7**

We cannot make the above verse mean something that would be inconsistent with Paul's teaching elsewhere on this subject. Clearly, then, the apostle is referring to those who have accepted the grace of God, and who—through faith—have been brought to repentance and forgiveness of sins. This is in complete contrast to the stubborn and unrepentant class of individuals the apostle had just mentioned in verse 5, and whom he will mention again in the following verses of this chapter.

Those who persist in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality. This is because the Holy Spirit has created them anew unto good works. (Eph. 2:10) Of course, they do not seek their own personal glory or honour. Rather, they seek to glorify and honour the name of the Lord. However, in addition to this, they aim for that glory and honour which they will one day experience in the presence of Christ whom they love and serve. Thus, essentially, their hearts and minds are not set on the transient things of this world, but on the eternal things of the world to come. In other words, they anticipate that day when complete immortality will be theirs. Such will be their sure reward in glory (Rom. 8:18,23-25; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 10:35-39)

Such are the promised blessings for all those who persist in doing good as an evidence of their new life in Christ Jesus. Their goodness demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and is a sure sign of their spiritual regeneration, justification and ongoing sanctification.

In marked contrast to those who seek glory, honour and immortality, Paul says in verse 8:

### **Romans 2:8**

Opposed to those who seek the glory, honour and praise that comes from God, are those who seek only their own praise glory and honour. As a rule, they are not concerned about the things of eternity, or of immortality. Rather, they are self-seeking. Their hearts and minds are set on the things and pleasures of this present age. Such people think nothing of rejecting the truth whenever it challenges or conflicts with their ideas, purposes or objectives.

These people typify those who turn the truth of God into a lie. They attempt to discredit the eternal and infallible truths of God's Word, the Bible, because they cannot bear to hear what it says. Often, however, they do so plausibly, and with a subtle pretence to superior expert knowledge concerning Biblical truths (Rom. 1:18,25; Job 24:13-17; John 3:18-20). So perverted has their mind become by sin and its consequences, that they foolishly imagine that the knowledge and the truths of finite and mortal man surpasses the knowledge (omniscience) and unchangeable truths of the eternal and infinite God!

Those, however, who reject truth—and especially God's eternal truths—find that they are led to accept misapprehension and error. Ultimately, they become grossly deceived and deluded in their thinking. When a person continually substitutes error for truth and wrong for right, a deceived and deluded mind is the inevitable consequence of his actions. Systematically, he is led to accept a course of ever-increasing falsehood and evil. (Titus 3:9-11; 2 Thess. 2:10-12)

Even so, many of these people may not appear obviously or outwardly evil. On the contrary, and to all appearances, they may seem highly respectable and morally upright citizens. So were many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Nevertheless, the Lord saw into their hearts or minds. He described these self-righteous and self-seeking men as 'whitewashed tombs': beautifully clean on the outside, but inwardly full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (Matt. 23:27-28) Thus, those who reject truth become corrupted by evil. When it opposes their viewpoint or interests, they try to pretend that God's Word is wrong and that their views are right.

What will be the outcome of those who pursue an evil course? At the end of verse 8, Paul says concerning them,

*8b ...there will be wrath and anger. (NIV)*

They will reap what they have sown. They have chosen to reject truth and to follow evil. Therefore, the God of truth and righteousness will judge them, as their evil deeds deserve. God will pour out his just wrath upon them in full measure. (Prov. 11:18-21) These people will experience in their own persons the terrible righteous anger of the Lord. They will be judged, condemned, and consigned for all eternity to that place of everlasting suffering, sorrow, pain and separation from God in the lake of fire.

In case anyone should misunderstand what Paul has just said here, or doubt that God will implement such judgment on impenitent mankind, the apostle reiterates the substance of these remarks when he writes:

**Romans 2:9-10**

Many people might be appalled at the prospect of so terrible and so enduring a judgment upon sinful mankind. But, if God did not judge sin, as sin deserves, then he would not be a just, righteous or holy God. God must prove true to his character or attributes. In his grace and mercy, he has provided an atonement for sin and a means of reconciliation with himself for all those sinners who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if we wilfully and stubbornly refuse to seek God's mercy, then we must pay the due penalty for our own sins. That penalty is death: spiritual, physical, and, ultimately, eternal death.

Thus, God is seen to be just in punishing sinners according to their deeds. It would be unrighteousness on God's part for him to pass over such sins and to pardon the guilty—unless a perfect satisfaction or atonement for sin had been made on the sinner's behalf by a sinless Substitute. However, for those who reject the Substitute whom God has provided, and who remain impenitent to the end, God's judgment stands: For them, there will be wrath and anger.

In verse 9, Paul says they will experience trouble and distress. In body and soul, they will experience everlasting sorrows, pain and grief, and unbearable anguish of heart and mind. They will be tormented for ever by an accusing and unforgiving conscience. They will be fully aware of the fact that—for all the ages of eternity—God has separated them from himself and from those they have loved. However, it will be too late to repent. This state will be their eternal distress—without affording them any hope of amelioration or ultimate deliverance.

This will be the destiny of everyone who continues to practise evil and who refuses to repent of his or her falsehoods and wicked deeds. It will apply to the Jew, and to the Gentile. It will apply to the most self-righteous sinner, and to the most degraded—whether Jew or Gentile. It will apply to the most 'morally upright' person who nevertheless refuses to acknowledge God and who secretly practises evil. No one will be excluded or excused. All evildoers and evil thinkers will face the just retribution and righteous wrath and anger of Almighty God. Everyone without exception will experience trouble and distress in body and soul for all eternity.

Quite the opposite will be true for all those who belong to Christ. In verse 10, Paul declares that glory, honour and peace will be theirs. Even now, everyone whose sins God has forgiven, and whom he has reconciled to himself, experiences in his heart and life genuine peace with God. However, greater degrees of peace, glory and honour await the believer in his Father's house (Rom. 5:1; 8:6; cf. Job 22:21; 29:11).

There, in the presence of the Lord, the redeemed saints of God will share in the eternal peace, joy and happiness of all the holy ones in heaven. This includes all God's people who have gone before, and all the holy angels who worship and serve the Lord. There, the people of God will share in the glory and honour that their Father has reserved for them in heaven. Never again will they endure sorrow, pain, suffering, or any other kind of distress or evil. Never again will they experience bodily or mental decay or death. These things will be no more. Rather, they will live and reign for ever with their Lord in his glorious kingdom. In addition, they will be reunited for all eternity with all those whom they have loved on earth, and who also have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the inheritance awaiting all those who persist in doing good because of their regeneration, justification and sanctification.

Again, this will be true of every Jew who turns to Christ, and of every Gentile who turns to Christ. It will be true of all those in every nation of the world who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. It will be true also of every class of believer, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest and from the most advantaged, favoured or honoured, to the most disadvantaged, deprived or despised:

### **Romans 2:11**

In his judgments of them, God does not discriminate between people because of their standing in society—or lack of it, or because of any supposed moral superiority. Nor does he show discrimination because of any other factor. (Deut. 10:17; Job 34:18-19; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17) God judges righteously, and without respect of persons. Those who qualify for condemnation will receive condemnation—irrespective of their position, standing or estimation among men.

Likewise, those who, by God's grace, qualify for acquittal at the throne of God, will certainly hear that sentence of acquittal pronounced. God will acquit them, however, because of Christ's redeeming work on their behalf—for they accepted the work of Christ, and believed on him as their Saviour. Therefore, God justly confirms the sentence already pronounced—these people are declared 'not guilty'.

On the Day of Judgment, God will not show partiality to anyone. The Jew will not exult over the Gentile or the Gentile over the Jew. Rather, everyone will stand absolutely silent before God, waiting to hear the resounding voice of God the Almighty.

### **God Will Judge All Mankind**

#### ***Romans 2:12-16***

God, therefore, will judge everyone—Jew or Gentile—according to what that person has done.

In verse 12, Paul expands on this subject:

#### **Romans 2:12**

Ignorance of the law is no excuse—for no one is truly ignorant of the principles of the law. God has written that law on their hearts; i.e. in their minds and consciences. All mankind know within themselves the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. These moral distinctions form part of the constitution of their nature. A sense of moral values, therefore, does not depend on upbringing or education alone. Moral values are inherent in man's nature.

In verse 12a, Paul says:

*12a All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law... (NIV)*

Those who sin 'apart from the law' are the Gentiles. Unlike the Jews, the Gentiles did not possess the written Word of God at that time. Thus, they lacked the written revelation of God's will for mankind, including his law. Thus, when the Gentiles sinned, they sinned apart from—or without the knowledge and guidance of—God's holy law as revealed in the Scriptures.

However, as has been noted earlier, this did not leave the Gentiles without excuse. When they sinned, they sinned knowingly and deliberately. God had engraved the basic principles of law on their inward nature. He had endowed them with conscience, and with a sense of right and wrong. No Gentile, therefore, could plead total ignorance of the law. When he sinned, he sinned against the law he had. Consequently, he will be judged apart from the written law, but according to the light he had. Thus, he will be judged less severely than those who possessed God's written law, but who disregarded that law. (Rom. 1:18-21,32; Matt. 11:22-24).

To this end, Paul declares in the latter part of verse 12:



*12b ...and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. (NIV)*

The Jews may have imagined that, as a nation, they were more favoured by God. After all, it was to the Jews—not to the Gentiles—that God had committed his written Word and made known his laws. However, far from placing the Jews on safer ground, the possession and knowledge of God's law only increased their sin and guilt whenever they transgressed God's law. Thus, Paul is saying that God will judge sinful Jews too.

Again, since the Jews were in possession of greater light, God will judge them more severely. The Lord will judge them by the standards of holiness, righteousness and justice which he revealed to them in his law, but which they disregarded. The Word of God thus makes plain that God does not show partiality. God will judge both Jew and Gentile. He will judge each, however, according to their works, and according to the light they had.

The Jews might have objected to Paul saying that they too would face God's judgment. After all, were not the Jews God's chosen people? Moreover, did not God bless the Jews above every nation on earth by giving them his holy Word? (Rom. 3:1-2; Deut. 4:7-9; Ps. 147:19-20.) These things are certainly true. However—as Paul makes clear in the next verse—it is not enough merely to possess the Scriptures:

### **Romans 2:13**

In and of itself, *possession* or *knowledge* of the Scriptures does not save anyone. The Jews were indeed greatly privileged. However, with great privilege comes great responsibility. God held the Jews responsible not only for preserving his Word, but also for hearing, learning, and—above all—obeying that Word. (Luke 8:21; Jas. 1:22-25)

No one, of course—by their obedience—can attain to the standard of righteousness that God requires or to eternal life. Nevertheless, God gave his law to demonstrate his perfect standard of righteousness and holiness, and to show to the Jews, and to all mankind, that they could not keep this law perfectly. Even so, God required that they obey the law as far as it lay within the power of fallen mankind to do so. However, the Lord also intended that—through seeing their own moral and spiritual inadequacy—men and women would be compelled to turn to him for grace and mercy (Rom. 3:20,23).

There was much that even fallen and sinful mankind could achieve in relation to the law (although it would not merit or contribute toward his salvation). In a measure, they could see something of God's most holy nature and revere him. They could honour their parents. They could show uprightness, honesty and integrity in their daily lives and in their relationships with one another. These were some of the very basic principles of God's law, and God required that they be practised—not just known about.

In the latter part of verse 13, Paul says that those who obey the law will be declared righteous. This is the first occurrence in Romans of the expression, to be '*declared righteous*' (or justified). This is a forensic term that is used when God, in his grace, justifies a person through his faith in Christ Jesus. Paul will deal with this concept more fully in chapter 3. Meanwhile, however, the apostle continues to speak of the general principles of law and judgment. Thus, in verse 14, Paul writes:

### **Romans 2:14**

This and the following verse proves conclusively that even those who do not possess God's written revelation (the Scriptures) still have a sense of law and order by the very constitution of their nature. By nature, they do things required by the law. By nature, they recognise the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. Again, by nature, the more responsible and orderly among them endeavour to promote the good of society and

discourage others from evil. Thus, they are a law to themselves—even although they are without God’s written laws as revealed in Scripture.

Paul continues this thought in verse 15, by saying:

### **Romans 2:15**

This verse too makes clear that those who do not know God and who do not possess his written law are not ignorant of the law’s basic requirements. If they are not ignorant of the law’s requirements, then they cannot be excused for breaking the law or for failing to fulfil its demands. Indeed, they are fully responsible for every sinful thought and every unlawful act that they commit. Their own conscience bears witness to their knowledge of the law, and to the fact that the first principles of this law have been engraved on their hearts. When they commit wrong, they know that they have done wrong, and their conscience accuses them.

On some occasions, others may accuse them of speaking or acting wrongly, when, in fact, they have not done so. On such occasions, their conscience defends them. In other words, conscience protects them to some extent from false accusations and from a false and unjustified sense of guilt.

Thus, it is evident from the very constitution of their nature that God has created all mankind with a spiritual and moral nature. He has given them an inherent sense of spiritual and moral values. However much sin and its effects may impair mankind’s moral nature, that moral nature is never totally eradicated. Sinful men and women may harden their consciences through sinning repeatedly, however. Yet, mankind remains a morally responsible being. God holds him fully accountable for all his thoughts, words and actions—and he will judge him accordingly.

From this, it is clear that all people—from the most civilised society, to the most uncivilised group of people—have this moral nature within them. Although there are vast differences in the amount of light or truth they have severally enjoyed, they will all be judged according to the measure of light they had. Those, however, who sinned in the light of far greater knowledge and privilege, will receive correspondingly greater judgment and condemnation.

When will all this take place? In verse 16, the apostle Paul says:

### **Romans 2:16**

God has set a Day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has appointed—our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:30-31) On that Day, mankind will appear before his judgment throne. Then, all humanity will be silenced by God’s almighty, majestic and sovereign presence (Rom. 3:19). As they stand silent before the throne of God and of the Lamb, the records of their lives and deeds will be made known. Every careless or idle word they have uttered will require an accounting. Even the most secret thoughts and intentions of their hearts and minds will be exposed and laid bare before the Lord. (Matt. 12:36; Luke 8:17; Rev. 20:12-15)

Thus, when they see the enormity of their sin and guilt exposed, unrepentant mankind will come to realise that God is just in judging them, and righteous in pronouncing upon them his sentence of condemnation. They will fall down and acknowledge him as the God of perfect justice, righteousness, holiness and truth. They will freely concede that the sentence of condemnation passed upon them has only been as their sins and iniquities have deserved.

Here, of course, we are speaking only of those who remain utterly impenitent and unbelieving until death or until the very Day of Judgment itself. But every one of those people who fall into this category will then be separated from the Lord for ever and consigned to that place prepared for the devil and his angels.

This is the message contained in the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of forgiveness of sin and of eternal salvation to all those who repent and believe on Christ. However, to those who remain impenitent and unbelieving to the end, the gospel will be the message through which they will be condemned, finally and eternally. For those who reject and repudiate Christ as Saviour and Lord, also reject and repudiate the only way of deliverance and salvation from sin and its penalty. (John 12:48)

## **Those Who Teach Others Must First Teach Themselves**

### ***Romans 2:17-27***

From verse 17 through, the apostle Paul addresses the Jew more directly and specifically. Thus, in verse 17, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 2:17**

Like many self-righteous people today, the Jews of Paul's day were inclined to despise the 'more wicked' of sinners. Many of the Jews considered themselves as morally superior to such people. Again, the Jews made much of their supposed special relationship to God—inferring in the process that the ungodly Gentiles had no reason to hope in God. God would never hear them because of their sins and iniquities, and because they did not belong to God's chosen people. (Ps. 135:4)

With a few notable and godly exceptions, however, the Jews had lost their own close relationship to God. Although they claimed to depend on God, they depended much more on keeping the law—at least, in its outward form. The Jews no longer adhered faithfully to God in trust and obedience. Rather, they adhered to the teaching and traditions of men. Outwardly, they held fast to the rules, rituals and ceremonies of their religion. They had a form of godliness, without the power (vv. 28-29; Matt. 15:3-9). Instead of honouring God through a proper observance of the law, the Jews had made the observance of the law their idol. Law keeping took the place of honouring God. Legal ritual took the place of love for God and love for one's neighbour. Tradition and ceremony took the place of true spiritual worship and praise.

Certainly, the Jews made much of their religion, but it was a religion of legalism and self-achievement rather than a religion of the heart and life. It was a religion of rules, regulations and ceremonies, rather than a religion of faith, love and true obedience. They lacked the important things, such as humility, truth, mercy and justice. Certainly, the Jews relied upon the law, but they could not keep the law. Even so, they accused others of breaking the law. Certainly, the Jews bragged about their special relationship to God. However, even while they boasted, they stood alienated from God because of their sin, rebellion and rejection of God's Anointed One. Nevertheless, many of these same people considered themselves as guides or instructors of those who did not know the Lord.

Thus, in verse 18, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 2:18**

The Jews possessed the Scriptures—the very Word of God. They knew his will. They knew what God required. Theoretically, at least, they approved of everything that was good, right and true. They approved of everything that was morally and spiritually superior,

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because they had been instructed in these things from their OT Scriptures (the 'law') (Cf. Deut. 4:8-9)

In the next verse, Paul continues:

### **Romans 2:19**

The Jews were utterly convinced that their knowledge of the Scriptures qualified them above all others to guide those who were spiritually blind. (A classic example, indeed, of the blind leading the blind!) (Isa. 56:10-11; Matt. 6:22-23; 15:12-14) The Jews remained firmly persuaded that they alone possessed true spiritual light or insight regarding the things of God. They were convinced that they alone could bring the light of God's truth to an immoral and spiritually darkened Gentile world.

In verse 20, the apostle further says concerning the Jews:

### **Romans 2:20**

Who, then, but the Jew could teach the unenlightened and uninstructed Gentiles? Who was better qualified to impart light and truth to these morally and spiritually disadvantaged Gentiles—these mere infants concerning spiritual matters?

On what basis did the Jew believe himself best qualified to instruct others? On the basis of, and possession of, the law: i.e. the Holy Scriptures. In these Scriptures, they possessed God's truth—his revealed will for all mankind. Embodied in these sacred pages was everything that mankind needed to know about God and about his relationship with God. However, (reasoned the Jews,) since they alone possessed these Holy Scriptures, then they alone were in a position to impart the knowledge of Scriptural truths to others.

Yet, were the Jews really qualified to teach others? Paul answers this very important question:

### **Romans 2:21**

Neither the Jew, nor anyone else, is in a position to teach others about moral and spiritual truths, if—first of all—they have not applied these truths to their own lives. Thus, Paul challenges such Jews—and anyone else—by asking,

*21b ... You who preach against stealing, do you steal? (NIV)*

Do you defraud God by withholding what you owe to him—in time, money or anything else? Do you defraud your neighbour by keeping back their entitlement, or failing to assist them in their need? Do you misappropriate goods or services? Do you always pay for everything you owe—in full? (Prov. 3:27-28; Rom. 13:7-8; Jas. 2:15-16; 5:4)

Paul continues by asking:

### **Romans 2:22a**

Have you ever been guilty of the very sin you condemn in others? Have you failed to observe chastity (sexual purity), dignity and honour before marriage, or complete faithfulness within marriage? Have you in any sense violated or abused the marriage relationship? Have you in any way degraded your body by using it in a way that God did not intend? (1 Cor. 6:9,13-20) Remember, too, that those who look lustfully at another person commit adultery with that person in their heart. (Matt. 5:28)

In the latter part of the same verse, Paul asks:

**Romans 2:22b**

In the past, the Jews had been guilty of gross idolatry. At the time Paul was writing, however, they professed to abhor idols, and they showed utter revulsion for idol worship and sacrifice. Even so, Paul thinks it necessary to challenge them on this. Perhaps they detested pagan idols. However, did they not create idols within their own hearts—idols of money, of material possession or of selfish ambition? Moreover, did they not thereby rob God of what was due to him in thanksgiving, praise, honour and glory? (Mal. 3:8-10).

It is hard to imagine the Jews robbing pagan temples—although many of these temples contained much wealth. However, since the Jews did not recognise the pagan gods or idols connected with these temples, they may at times have been guilty of sacrilege (sacrilege, that is, in the eyes of the pagan devotees). (Cf. Jer. 7:4-11; see esp. v.11; see also Mal. 1:14)

Then, Paul asks these custodians of God's Word:

**Romans 2:23**

Now Paul rounds on anyone who considers himself morally superior to others—including those who became involved in the vilest of sins.

Now, says Paul to his supposed Jewish adversaries, you brag about the fact that you *know* the Scriptures. However, do you *obey* the Scriptures? Do you do what the Scriptures say? God has set forth his standards of behaviour in his Word. However, do you live by these standards? Is it not rather the case that you dishonour God and his law by breaking his commands? The Jews, of course, had no answer to this line of argument. They knew they were guilty as charged. However, they imagined (vainly) that their sins and failures to observe God's law were not as obnoxious and reprehensible in God's sight as those of the Gentiles.

To many of the Jews, the sins of the Gentiles were utterly detestable. Yet, as Paul declared in verse 1 of this chapter, these Jews were in no fit state to pass judgment on anyone else. (The same, of course, is true of any one of us who would pass judgment on other people, instead of showing concern for them and for their salvation. Although sinless himself, the Lord Jesus walked among sinners, touched them, and talked to them about the kingdom of God and about their need of salvation. The Lord did not condemn sinners as such. He condemned only self-righteous people, like many of the Pharisees. The Pharisees professed righteousness, but did not practise it. They insisted on moral purity in others, but they themselves were morally unclean. Luke 9:56; John 3:17; Matt. 23:27)

Such was the sinful conduct of many of the Jews that their behaviour brought the name of the Lord into disrepute. Thus, Paul writes:

**Romans 2:24**

{Cf. Isaiah 52:5; Ezek. 36:22}

Before and during their captivity, many of the Jews had conducted themselves in such a manner that their behaviour had brought shame and dishonour upon God's name. Indeed, the Jews had caused their captors to despise and blaspheme that holy and majestic Name. It was to this situation in Israel's history that Paul was alluding when he quoted the above passage from the OT Scriptures. (2 Sam. 12:14; Ezek. 36:20-23)

However, even in the apostle's own day, the very same thing was still happening. Because of the Jews' sinful conduct, the name of God was being despised, belittled and blasphemed among the Gentiles. This was true not only among the Roman oppressors,

but also further afield—wherever the Jews had travelled or had been scattered. Thus, far from living by the law of the Lord, the Jews often dishonoured that law and brought disgrace upon God's holy Name.

What, then, counters Paul, is the point of claiming to *know* the Scriptures, if—by your very life—it is evident that you do not *obey* the Scriptures? Why claim allegiance to God, and connection with the family of God, if your daily life does not conform to the rule of God's Word?

Let us suppose, however, that the Jews—or other kindred individuals—have proposed an answer to Paul's objections: Notwithstanding our admitted shortcomings or sins, yet God accepts us because we have been circumcised. (Today, we may substitute, God accepts us because . . . we have been born into a Christian family, or because we have been baptised, or because we are members of a particular church or denomination).

The Jews contended: Since we have been circumcised, we are therefore the obedient and faithful children of Abraham. Consequently, since Abraham is our father, we are also the true sons and daughters of God. Because of our obedience to the Abrahamic covenant and to the rite of circumcision, God will accept us (for he has pledged to do so), and he will pardon all our iniquities. (Matt. 3:9-10; 8:11-12; John 8:39-44)

What is Paul's answer to this very plausible, but most insidious and subtle, line of argument? Beginning from verse 25, the apostle clearly and powerfully states:

### **Romans 2:25**

Yes, there is value in the rite of circumcision—but only if you observe the law. God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign and seal of the covenant that he had made with Abraham. (Gen. 17:9-14) However, on what did God base this covenant? He based it on his own promise to make of Abraham a great nation—and Abraham's faith in that promise.

Although, at the time God made this promise, Abraham was well advanced in years and childless, he believed the LORD. Because of his faith in God's word, the LORD reckoned Abraham righteous. Although by no means faultless, Abraham continued to live a life of faith in God, of trust in his promises, and of obedience to his Word. (Gen. 12:1-4; 15:1-6; 17:15-22; 21:1-7)

Now then, so long as the professing people of God follow Abraham's example of faith, trust, and obedience, then the ordinances that God has appointed will be of great value to them. They will be to them a sign and seal of God's love and faithfulness toward them, and of the unchangeable promises made to them in his Word. (Rom. 4:11-12)

If, however, a person fails to follow Abraham's example of faith, trust, and obedience, and if he fails to apply God's Word to his life, then the ordinances that God has appointed will not benefit him in the least. For him, they are merely outward rituals or ceremonies, without indicating any inward spiritual renewal. However, if a person has not been spiritually renewed, he is not one of God's people—and no amount of legal observances, or conformity to rites and ceremonies, can ever make him so. (Gal. 6:15; cf. Jer. 9:25-26)

Again, if a person lives his life in disregard of God's Word and law, then he proves himself no different from an unbeliever. In the case of the Jews, this would be equivalent to saying that he was 'one who had not been circumcised.' However, to be as one who had not been circumcised was to be the same as a Gentile or the heathen. Such a thought appalled the Jew. Rather than be classed with the uncircumcised and the ungodly, the Jew considered himself more righteous and more godly if he observed the physical act of circumcision—even although, in reality, this made no difference to his inward life.

In the next verse, the apostle Paul considers the situation hypothetically from the opposite side:

**Romans 2:26**

Such a suggestion must have horrified the more orthodox Jews. Usually, ‘the uncircumcised’ meant the Gentiles. However, among the Gentiles were some of the most ungodly and immoral people on earth. (Clearly, the Jews had forgotten their own history!) Yet, Paul is saying that if some of these people—presumably, those of a better kind—somehow managed to keep the law’s requirements, God would accept them. Moreover, he would accept them for their obedience—even although they had never been circumcised! (Isa. 56:6-7; Matt. 8:11-12) Such a proposition was unthinkable to the Jew.

Paul, of course, knew that no one could keep the law in a manner acceptable to God. Indeed, as he will show in due course, by the law all mankind stands condemned. The apostle, however, is making the point that the outward sign—in this case, circumcision—must be associated with a real inward change of heart. In addition, and of necessity, that change of heart must produce a change in behaviour. It must result in godly living.

Paul continues:

**Romans 2:27**

Physical circumcision counts for nothing if true inward circumcision does not follow it: i.e. the cutting away or removal of an unclean heart (or mind). (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4)

If, however, a person has not been physically circumcised—but, from a renewed and cleansed heart, obeys the law of God—that person will condemn you. That is, his godly manner of life will have the effect of condemning your ungodly life. This applies even although you are circumcised, and he is not. It applies even although you have the written Word of God, and he does not. For, although you have very great advantages, you are nevertheless a law-breaker. You are a person who fails to apply the teachings of God’s Word to your own heart and life. Therefore, circumcision is of no value in your case. It cannot act as a sign and seal of God’s covenant with you or his promises to you, when clearly you do not belong to God.

The same is true of both baptism and the Lord Supper. These ordinances have been ordained by the Lord, and are of the utmost importance. Thus, we ought never to neglect them. However, if a person has not experienced regeneration by the Spirit of God, then baptism will not cleanse or save him. Nor will participation in Communion or the Lord’s Supper make him a child of God. Baptism becomes a sign and seal of a person’s relationship with God. It symbolises the cleansing effects of the Holy Spirit in his life, and his union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. However, before any of this can be true, that person must first be born from above by the Holy Spirit.

**True Religion Changes Heart and Life**

**Romans 2:28-29**

True religion is a matter of the heart—not a matter of external observances alone. Thus, in verse 28, the apostle writes:

**Romans 2:28**

Outward profession does not necessarily correspond with inward reality. A man who professes with his tongue to be a Jew, is not truly a Jew if his heart is not right with God. Nor

does circumcision guarantee a person's acceptance by God. It is certainly not true—as some of the rabbis claimed—that no circumcised person would ever enter hell. External circumcision is of no avail if it is not accompanied in due course by true spiritual circumcision. Spiritual circumcision is the cleansing or cutting away of an unclean heart and life.

The same is true of those professing to belong to Christ. External profession alone does not make a person a Christian or a child of God. That profession must be accompanied by an inward change of heart: i.e., a new spiritual birth producing a godly and holy life. (John 3:3-8,10-18) Similarly, baptism does not admit anyone into the kingdom of God or make him a child of God. If a genuine change of heart and life does not accompany it, baptism is of no avail to anyone. (1 Pet. 3:21; Col. 2:11-12)

Concerning the true rite and place of circumcision, Paul writes:

### **Romans 2:29**

This confirms what has just been said above: true circumcision is a matter of the heart—not a matter of external rites and ceremonies. Rites and ceremonies appointed by God did have their proper place (as do the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper today). These rites or ordinances were not to be despised or neglected. However, external ordinances are to no avail if a renewed heart and life does not accompany them. In addition, a renewed heart and life—or circumcision of the heart—is not a result of ritual or ceremonial observances, but of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration.

Thus we see that it is not the observance of written rules and regulations that saves, but faith in the Word of God and regeneration of the heart effected by the Holy Spirit. Those who have received such a gift from God recognise—in all humility—their complete indebtedness to God and to his grace. They seek only to honour the Lord in their daily lives, and to win his praise. They certainly do not seek honour and praise from men. God has given them all they have, and they seek above all else to praise, honour and glorify his great and holy Name. (2 Cor. 10:17-18) This is the kind of person who is truly a child of God, who is truly circumcised, and who is truly a descendant of Abraham—the man of faith.



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## Romans Chapter 3

### God Remains Faithful

#### *Romans 3:1-8*

##### **Romans 3:1**

If, however, circumcision does not guarantee a place in the Abrahamic covenant or in the kingdom of God, what advantage is there in being a Jew?

The fact that Paul could picture the Jews as asking such a question shows how mistaken many of them were concerning the nature and purpose of circumcision. To the Jew, the physical mark of circumcision was a token or sign that the person who bore that mark was a child of Abraham and of God—one of God's own people. It mattered little whether that person happened to live a godly or an ungodly life. As long as he was physically circumcised, God would not ultimately reject him from his kingdom or from among his people. The same, of course, is true of everyone who trusts in the supposed efficacy of baptism. They mistakenly believe that, because they have been baptised, God will not ultimately exclude them from his kingdom—even although they may live an ungodly life.

However, the very point that Paul has been making so forcefully is that circumcision saves no one. A changed heart and life (i.e. godly conduct) must accompany it. What counts is not physical circumcision, but circumcision of the heart—the 'cutting away' or cleansing of an unclean heart. (Rom. 2:25-29) So also with baptism: If a baptised person does not exhibit a godly life, his baptism will by no means save him from the judgment of God or from eternal condemnation.

However, if circumcision is not a saving and sanctifying rite (which it is not), what advantage is there, then, in being a Jew? Paul answers this in verse 2:

##### **Romans 3:2**

There are in fact very considerable advantages in being a Jew. (Paul lists the first of these below, but he does not continue with the other advantages until Romans chapter 9, verses 4-5)

The advantages of being a Jew, however, did not lie in the fact that they practised the rite of circumcision—nor even with their much-vaunted connection with Abraham. Rather, and much more importantly, it lay in the fact that—to the Jews—God had committed his Holy Scriptures—the oracles of God. (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21) No other nation on earth possessed the written revelation of God's will and purposes for mankind. The Jews alone were the trustees of these most sacred oracles. (Deut. 4:7-8; Neh. 9:13-14; Ps. 147:19-20)

Those Gentiles, therefore, who were seeking the salvation of the Lord, could do so only through the Jewish Scriptures: For, as the Lord Jesus said, Salvation is from the Jews. (John 4:22) This refers both to the way of salvation revealed in the Jewish Scriptures, and to the Messiah or Saviour of whom these Scriptures spoke.

This, then, placed a very great responsibility on the Jewish people to make known the Word of God to other nations. Some of these other nations possessed their own 'holy scriptures'—but they did not possess the Scriptures of Truth. Only the Jews possessed

the truth as revealed by God through the OT Scriptures. This, therefore, was the Jew's first and foremost advantage over all other nations. They possessed the light of truth—the only light and truth for all mankind. Sadly, however, many of the Jews did not walk in the light of the Scriptures. Rather, they harmonised their lives with the teachings and traditions of men. In their hearts, they did not believe what the Scriptures said. (John 5:39-40)

Thus, in verse 3, Paul writes:

### **Romans 3:3**

Paul concedes that a number of the Jews disbelieved the Word and promises of God. They placed more faith in the observance of outward rites and ceremonies, than in the faithful observance and application of God's Word to their lives. Instead of possessing a living vibrant faith in God, they held fast to a mere outward form of religion: a nominal or formal faith, lacking the reality of inward power. According to James, such a faith—an inactive or unproductive faith—is a dead faith. (Isa. 1:11-20; Jas. 2:17; see also Rom. 9:6; 10:16)

However—enquires Paul—will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Does God cease to be faithful to his Word and to his promises when men refuse to believe his Word or to act upon it? Paul answers this question most emphatically:

### **Romans 3:4**

{Cf. Psalm 51:4}

Man's unfaithfulness to God and to his Word in no way affects the faithfulness or the veracity of God. God remains utterly faithful. He will fulfil every promise he has made in his Word—whether that promise relates to salvation or to judgment. According to his Word, God will bless those who trust in him and his Son, but he will judge those who despise and reject him and his Son.

To this end, and concerning Eli the priest of God who failed to discipline his wicked sons, the Scriptures say:

*30 "Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me for ever. But now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained.'" (1 Sam. 2:30 NIV)*

Ultimately, the LORD removed Eli and his house from his service, and afflicted them with grief and shortness of life. (1 Sam. 2:31-36) God must remain true to his Word and to his promises (including his threatened judgment of wrongdoers). If this means that God's unchangeable nature effectively proves every man a liar when he tries to deny God or his judgments, then so be it.

At this point, the apostle Paul quotes part of a passage from Psalm 51 verse 4:

*(Rom. 8:4b NIV) As it is written:*

*(Ps. 51:4b)... "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."*

This Psalm reflects David's acknowledgement and confession of sin after his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. David, however, had been guilty not only of this most vile offence; he had also been responsible for causing the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. In this matter too David sinned most grievously against the Lord. (2 Sam. 11:2-24)

The apostle Paul quotes only the latter part of Psalm 51 verse 4. The full verse reads:

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge. (Ps. 51:4 NIV)*

God had remained utterly faithful to his Word in respect of David. When David sinned, God demonstrated his justice and righteousness by punishing David. Thus, God showed David the enormity of his sinful adultery with Bathsheba and the criminality of his calculated and evil actions in causing the death of her husband, Uriah. In consequence of these sins, the child born to Bathsheba died.

Thus, God showed that he remained true and faithful to every word he had spoken: In grace, mercy and compassion, he forgives the truly repentant and cleanses him from all sin. However, in justice, righteousness and truth, he punishes those of his people who sin and who bring disgrace and dishonour upon God's holy name.

We must remember, of course, that David aggravated his guilt and sin by failing to acknowledge and confess them to God. Only when God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him with his sins, did David acknowledge his dreadful wrongdoings to the Lord. (2 Sam. 12:1-23)

However, if God remains true to his promises concerning one person (David), then it is certain that he will remain true to his promises concerning everyone else. He will bless those who honour him, and will punish those who dishonour or disgrace his name, as did David.

Some people, however, seemed to imagine that—since ultimately God forgave David—then he will forgive all manner of sins whenever they are confessed. Such people conveniently forget that God forgave David only after he truly repented of his sins and utterly renounced them. They forget too that the Lord disciplined David severely by taking his child from him. Even so, these same people seem to imagine that the more a person sins, the more it enhances God's righteousness when—in his grace, mercy and compassion—he forgives those sins. This is indeed a grossly distorted concept of God's grace and mercy, and of his justice and righteousness. But that some people did hold this view of God's character seems apparent from verse 5. There Paul writes:

### **Romans 3:5**

This demonstrates something of the depravity and perversity of the human mind. If God is so utterly faithful to his Word, then—according to his promises—he must forgive our sins whenever we confess them. Apparently, this is considered to apply no matter how heinous these sins might be. In addition, (so the argument goes,) since this act of magnanimity on God's part greatly enhances his righteousness, then why not practise sin? Thus, in forgiving it, God will receive even greater glory!

This form of reasoning is, of course, totally perverse and wholly unsound both in its premise and in its conclusion. Those who use such an argument completely overlook the fact that God punished David severely for his sin. No amount of contrition or broken-heartedness on David's part could induce God to spare his son. Certainly, the Lord forgave David completely and cleansed him totally of his admittedly most serious offences. However, he did so only when David acknowledged his guilt to the Lord; when he confessed his sin, and when he utterly renounced it in God's presence. There was no question of David repeating or multiplying his sins in order (supposedly) to magnify God's grace and mercy toward him.

## Expository Notes

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Those who speak of God's grace and righteousness being magnified through repeated sinning and confession of sin must remember that God's righteousness is never exhibited in isolation from his holiness or his justice. According to his just and holy nature, God will by no means permit sin to pass unpunished or undisciplined. (Deut. 34:7; Nahum 1:3)

It certainly was no answer therefore to contend that our repeated sinfulness enhanced God's righteousness, or to say that God was unjust in bringing his wrath on us. This again is based on a complete misapprehension of God's character, and of the way that he deals with sin. God forgives the truly repentant sinner—but only because of an atonement or atoning and substitutionary sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22)

For us who believe in Christ, this atonement for sin was made through the shedding of his blood on our behalf. Jesus, the holy Lamb of God, was punished for our sin. Although remaining absolutely sinless himself, the Lord Jesus bore the full responsibility for all our sin. He endured the holy and just wrath of God on our behalf (vv. 25-26).

If, however, a person has not received forgiveness through repentance and faith in Christ, then—in justice and righteousness—he himself must bear the wrath of God for his sins. This, however, represents—not an injustice on God's part—but rather a perfect example of his holy and righteous justice. It is only on this basis that God could judge all mankind.

Thus, in answer to his rhetorical question ...is [God] unjust in bringing his wrath on us?—the apostle Paul states in verse 6:

### **Romans 3:6**

According to the argument being used by Paul's imagined interlocutor, the more a person sins, the more God's righteousness is magnified in forgiving these sins. In addition, since God's righteousness is magnified through a person's sin, then it would be unjust of God to punish the sinner!

We can see exactly where this evil form of argument is taking us. If it would be unjust in God to punish the sinner, then there can be no final judgment of sinners, and no such place as eternal punishment or hell. Ultimately—and according to this line of argument—God will have mercy upon everyone. In order to enhance his righteous and merciful character even more, he will forgive everyone.

Clearly, this is not what the Scriptures teach. On the contrary, the Word of God tells us consistently that God punishes sin, both in this age and in the age to come. There is indeed a hell or 'lake of fire', as the Scriptures abundantly and clearly attest.

It is certain that, one day, God will judge the world—in accordance with the Scriptures. On that day, those who have continued to practise sin and have remained impenitent to the end, will be judged as their deeds deserve and as God's justice and righteousness requires. The Lord will cast them into outer darkness. There, they will endure the eternal wrath of God—that wrath which burns like fire. (Matt. 8:12; 25:30; Jer. 4:4; 21:12; Nahum 1:6) They will be separated from God for ever in that place prepared for the devil and his angels. Because it is a place of torments, and the place where God's holy and righteous wrath burns like fire, the Bible refers to this place as 'the lake of fire'. (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:14-15)

Those, however, who have practised righteousness and remained faithful to the end, will be judged accordingly. In their case, God's righteousness and justice requires that they be shown mercy and grace. For Christ's sake, God will confirm their acquittal at his judgment throne. They will be received for ever into the glorious presence of their God. There, they will live and reign with Christ over his eternal kingdom.

Someone, however, might not be satisfied with Paul's answer that God's glory could not be enhanced by forgiving a person who repeatedly sinned, and then confessed these sins. Thus, in verse 7, Paul declares:

**Romans 3:7**

In verse 3, Paul had asked if a person's lack of faith would nullify God's faithfulness. To which, in verse 4a, the apostle had answered:

*4a Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar... (NIV)*

However, if God's faithfulness is maintained—even if every human being became a deceiver or a liar—then why not practise falsehood? Why not lie, deceive and practise hypocrisy so that God's glory may be even further enhanced? Indeed, if—by practising falsehoods—God's truthfulness is enhanced, why does God still condemn me as a sinner? My sin and guilt is simply proving that God is telling the truth about sin. However, if God's truthfulness concerning mankind's sin magnifies his glory and his righteousness, why does he condemn the very sin that his truth exposes?

It seems that only someone under the controlling influence of the devil himself could present such a wicked argument. Yet, this argument comes from the depths of fallen human nature—without any direct support or influence from Satan.

By his own admission, the person who presents this kind of argument is a sinner. By his own admission, God is righteous, truthful and just. By his own admission, God's truth exposes his sin and threatens righteous judgment against the sinner. Yet, instead of conceding that God's truth justly condemns his sin, this person tries to turn the argument on its head: he accuses God of condemning him unjustly! He finds fault with God because his own twisted mind believes that God should reward him since his sin is exposed by God's truth! Only a truly perverse and sin-darkened mind could argue like this. Yet, this is precisely how Paul sees some of his opponents.

These people, of course, were attacking the gospel of God's grace. The fact that they could not earn or merit salvation—but had to accept it as a gift of God's grace—offended and even enraged certain people. Thus, in their pride and anger, they falsely and maliciously accused the gospel messengers of preaching a doctrine that led to moral licence—the freedom to live as one pleased. This, of course, was the very thing many of these opponents of the gospel were doing themselves. Yet, they had the audacity to accuse the followers of Christ of living such wicked lives!

The apostle confirms that such indeed was the case. Thus, in verse 8, he writes:

**Romans 3:8**

To say that God's truthfulness and righteousness was enhanced by a person's sin, led to only one logical conclusion: *"Let us do evil that good may result."*

No one who belonged to the people of God could possibly propose or support such a wicked argument. Thus, essentially, Paul is saying that—even although some of these same people were relying on circumcision—yet, if they argued in this manner, they had no part or lot in the kingdom of God. Despite any claims to the contrary, they are neither the children of Abraham nor the children of God. (Rom. 8:8,9b; 1 Cor. 6:9-10)

The same is true of those in rely on baptism and yet pose the same kind of argument for living a sinful life. Regardless of their baptism, church membership or any other outward sign, they cannot belong to Christ. Those who practise sin consistently cannot have ex-

perienced the regenerating, saving and sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit. They are still in their sins. They are still under the wrath and condemnation of God.

Thus, concerning such people, Paul declares:

*8c ...Their condemnation is deserved. (NIV)*

Yet, some of the people who heard Paul preach the gospel of God's grace, slanderously accused the apostle of encouraging people to continue living a life of sin. After all—they claimed—if a person is saved from condemnation and wrath by God's grace, then God's grace will continue to forgive him whenever he sins. Thus, because he is not depending on a good or righteous life to save him—but on God's grace—he can deliberately practise all manner of sins. For, when he confesses his sins to God, God—in his grace—will forgive him.

Once again, this represents a wicked and perverse form of argument. It completely distorts the nature of God's grace toward truly repentant sinners. It fails to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. In addition, it fails to take into account the justice, holiness and righteousness of Almighty God. (Rom. 5:20 - 6:2,12-19)

Those who have truly experienced the grace of God in their lives do not despise that grace. Rather, they live their life to the honour and glory of the God who loved them and who gave his Son for them, to cleanse them from all iniquity. Those whom God has justified by his grace, and whom his Holy Spirit has regenerated and is sanctifying, endeavour to live by the Spirit of God. By the grace of God, they do their utmost to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and to live a holy, honourable and godly life. Furthermore, the righteous and holy character of God would never permit him to overlook, condone or approve of a person's sinful way of life—especially if that person professed to belong to God. If such were the case, God would act in love and discipline to punish and correct his wayward child—as he did with David.

Thus, Paul is right when he says that people who claim that the gospel message encourages sinful behaviour are slandering those who present that message. For manifestly this is not a true representation of the gospel of God's grace. Even worse, however, such people are effectively slandering or blaspheming God. They are saying that God's message—the gospel of grace—encourages a person to practise a sinful life. Such, of course, represents the heights of moral, spiritual and intellectual wickedness. Only those with some intellectual understanding of the gospel (but without any spiritual understanding) could so pervert and misrepresent the truth. (Jude 4)

A person must be very careful what he says about God's Word, lest he be found speaking against God. Similarly, a person must be very careful not to reject or disagree with certain parts of God's Word, lest he be found rejecting or disagreeing with what God has declared as true.

## None Righteous, Not Even One

### ***Romans 3:9-18***

Paul has just shown that—although the Jew has many advantages—this in itself does not commend him to God. Rather, it increases his responsibilities toward God. The same applies to any person who considers himself morally superior to, or more righteous than, the ungodly. Thus, in verse 9, Paul asks:



**Romans 3:9**

What conclusions may we come to from all this? Are we superior to others? Most certainly not! For this manifestly is not true. As far as God is concerned, everyone stands before him on the same level. We all alike are under sin. Both Jew and Gentile stand before God under the power and the penalty of sin. Thus, the whole world stands condemned. (Rom. 2:1)

Someone might object to being classed among the ungodly and the unrighteous. Thus, Paul continues by proving his point from the OT Scriptures. The Jews in particular were very familiar with these Scriptures. Beginning his quotation in verse 10, the apostle writes:

**Romans 3:10**

{Cf. Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3}

Not one member of the entire human race is righteous—not even one. Everyone has strayed from the paths of God’s truth and righteousness. Everyone has turned away from God to follow his own ways. (Isa. 53:6) If everyone is unrighteous in the eyes of the Lord, then everyone must stand justly condemned in God’s presence. No one can ever hope to make himself acceptable to God by his own efforts, since already he is under the wrath and judgment of God for his sin.

In the next verse, the apostle continues his quotation from the OT Scriptures:

**Romans 3:11**

In moral and spiritual terms, to understand is to know God. For true wisdom, knowledge and understanding come from God and relate to God. The mind cannot function fully, as God intended, unless it be enlightened from above by the Spirit of God, and guided by the principles of divine love, justice, truth and righteousness. (Rom. 1:22; 1 Cor. 1:18-31) Left to himself, however, no-one seeks God. Thus while the world remains alienated from God and from his Spirit, they remain in moral and spiritual darkness. Their mind searches for—but never finds—ultimate truth. For that truth is hidden with Christ in God. The Spirit of God reveals it to regenerate men and women only. (1 Cor. 2:7-16; Col. 2:2-3)

The unregenerate man or woman, however, cannot understand the things that matter, for they do not seek the Light of the world. They do not seek the light of truth and righteousness that comes only through knowing Christ savingly and personally. Of necessity, then, they must continue to walk in darkness, or moral and spiritual blindness. (John 8:12)

However, where does all this lead a person? Step by step, it leads them ever further away from God and from the paths of righteousness, truth and justice. Thus, in verse 12, Paul continues:

**Romans 3:12**

{Cf. Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20}

Everyone without exception has turned his back on God, and wandered from the paths of righteousness: i.e., the way of righteous living revealed in the Scriptures. Instead, he has set his heart on pursuing the way of self-interest, of unrighteousness and of evil. This, however, is the broad way that leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13)

All those who walk in this way become morally worthless in the eyes of the Lord. They have wasted their lives by reckless and careless living, by departing from God, and by fol-

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lowing their own ways. Even worse, they have greatly imperilled their souls by refusing to seek the mercy and salvation of the Lord. (Luke 15:12-14)

Worthless behaviour leads ever downward to greater depths of moral and spiritual degradation, ruin and despair. Yet this is the certain destiny of all those who follow the paths of unrighteousness—unless the grace of God reaches them first.

At the end of verse 12, the Scripture reminds us once again that there is not a single human being on this earth who does good—not even one.

From general ungodliness, the apostle now begins to mention some specific types of sin. Thus, still quoting from the OT Scriptures, Paul writes in verse 13:

### Romans 3:13

{Cf. Psalm 5:9; Psalm 140:3}

Here, the apostle quotes (directly or indirectly) from three of the Psalms. These quotations highlight what the Lord Jesus Christ himself said about the depravity of unregenerate human nature.

Thus in Matthew's Gospel, the Lord declares:

*18 "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'." (Matt. 15:18-20 NIV)*

In verse 13a, the apostle quotes from Psalm 5:9:

*"...Their throats are open graves..." (NIV)*

This parallels the Lord's words to the Pharisees in Matthew's Gospel:

*27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matt. 23:27-28 NIV)*

The same polluted and morally unclean nature permeates every human being. In addition, the things we say become contaminated by the corrupt nature within us. Thus, every evil, unkind, or thoughtless word is an expression of our unclean or polluted heart or mind.

Quoting Psalm 5:9 or 140:3, the latter part of Romans 3, verse 13 reads:

*"...their tongues practise deceit." (NIV)*

Those who are inwardly unclean think nothing of practising falsehoods or other forms of deception, or of practising double standards. They lie to protect themselves or their friends, or to further their own interests. They disregard the truth whenever it suits them, because they have disregarded the God of truth and have despised the way of righteousness. Not only do they lie and deceive, however, but they also slander their neighbour, gossip about others, spread untruthful rumours, and perpetuate unjust, malicious and unsubstantiated reports. (Jer. 9:3-6)

Thus, the Scripture says of them:

13b... *"The poison of vipers is on their lips."* (Ps. 140:3 NIV)

Their evil and slanderous remarks cause a great deal of harm, and can be extremely hurtful to other people. Indeed—as with the poisonous bite of the viper—their evil and unfounded reports can often lead to the ruin and destruction of other people, or at least to very considerable pain and distress.

In the next verse, the apostle continues with his quotations from the OT by writing:

#### **Romans 3:14**

{Cf. Psalm 10:7}

*"...Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* (Matt. 12:34b NIV; see vv. 34a-37)

These words of the Lord Jesus exemplify the true nature of men and women. Their evil words are an expression of, or an overflow from, their wicked and unregenerate hearts. Such people frequently resort to all manner of coarse, foul and perverse language. But, whether it be curses or foul expressions, this kind of language is a window showing the true state of their heart and soul.

These people are in the gall of bitterness. Because they refused to acknowledge God or give him glory, God has given them over to their sinful way of life, and to that way of life they have become enslaved. Yet, they remain wholly responsible to God, and accountable to him, for their present situation and for every word they speak and deed they commit.

They chose to indulge sin and to reject God. Now, sin has become their master. Instead of their chosen delight and pleasure, sin has gained the upper hand. Every evil word they utter and deed they commit shows to what extent sin has taken control of their willing—but now enslaved—hearts and minds. Every unclean expression demonstrates that they are abiding under the wrath and condemnation of God—awaiting only his final judgment on their unrighteous and ungodly lives. Only the direct intervention of God could possibly save them now from just and eternal condemnation.

Nevertheless, wicked as they are, these sins do not show the worst of mankind's moral and spiritual depravity. Paul demonstrates that fallen mankind can descend to even greater depths of unrighteousness. Thus, quoting again from the OT Scriptures, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 3:15**

They do not confine themselves to sins of the heart or the tongue. Instead, they are quick to engage in a variety of evil acts against other people. They attack and rob with violence, causing injury and distress to innocent victims. With irresponsible and culpable neglect and carelessness, they cause serious injury or death to other people. So greatly have some of them become embroiled in evil, that they deliberately and wilfully plan the death of others. They are murderers, killers, and assassins. Yet, those who harbour murderous thoughts in their minds are also guilty of murder—in their hearts.

In verse 16, Paul continues with his quotations:

#### **Romans 3:16**

Wherever they go, these individuals cause ruin and misery to other people. They are a curse on the earth. Their own lives, too, are marked by ruin and misery of soul. For great

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indeed is the bitterness of those who have forsaken God and chosen the way of unrighteousness and sin. Thus in verse 17, the apostle cites the Scripture that says:

### Romans 3:17

{Cf. Isaiah 59:7,8}

The passage from which Paul quotes in verses 15-17 is Isaiah chapter 59. Considering more of these verses in context, we read:

Isaiah 59:1,2,6-8, NIV)

*1 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.*

*2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear...*

*6 Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands.*

*7 Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways.*

*8 The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no-one who walks in them will know peace.*

They do not know the way of peace, for they do not know the God who gives peace and rest to the soul. They refuse to acknowledge their Maker or to confess their need of him. Thus, they can never experience that true and lasting peace that the Lord gives to his own people, and that the world can never take away or extinguish. (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1)

Such peace comes only to those whom God has forgiven and reconciled to himself through repentance and faith in his Son. However, these people have rejected God and his salvation. Thus, they have rejected their only hope of true and lasting peace within. (Isa. 57:21)

Paul confirms this in verse 18 with his final quotation from the OT Scriptures:

### Romans 3:18

{Cf. Psalm 36:1}

In Proverbs, it is written:

*7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools<sup>[1]</sup> despise wisdom and discipline. (Prov. 1:7 NIV; see also vv.22, 29-32; 8:13)*

To fear God is to honour his great and holy Name, and to give him glory. It is to reverence, praise and worship the One who made heaven and earth, and who rules over his creation. It is to acknowledge the power, glory and majesty of God Most High and Jesus Christ his Son. It is to fall down and worship before him in humble submission, gratitude and thankfulness for all the wonders of his love. It is to acknowledge not only God's jus-

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew words rendered fool in Proverbs, and often elsewhere in the Old Testament, denote one who is morally deficient. [NIV footnote to Prov. 1:7]

tice, righteousness and truth, but also his love, grace and mercy toward undeserving, but truly repentant and believing sinners—sinners spared from condemnation by God's eternal and infinite grace. In short, to fear God is to worship God in reverence and awe. (Heb. 12:28)

Ungodly men, however, have no fear of God in their hearts. However, this only demonstrates their folly. For—no matter how ungodly they may be—no one can rationally deny the existence or power of God. He can only do so irrationally, by attempting to suppress the truth around him, and within his own heart and conscience. (Rom. 1:18-22)

However, since all mankind knows the truth—suppressed or not—they also know that they have every reason to fear God. In their case, however, the fear of God means the terrors of God: i.e., his righteous wrath and judgment on the ungodly.

This is very different from the reverent fear of the believer. To the believer in Christ, the terrors of God's judgment have been removed, and God is a gracious, loving heavenly Father. To the unbeliever, however, God can only remain his righteous Judge. (Rom. 8:1-2)

Thus, in his heart, the unbeliever tries desperately to deny the existence, power, glory and judgment of God by suppressing the truth. However, for all his denials, and feigned atheism or agnosticism, God will judge him as his evil deeds deserve and as his justice requires. (Ps. 14:1)

Such, then, is the very bleak picture drawn of all mankind—whether Jew or Gentile. Every single individual is under the power of sin and liable to sin's penalty and judgment, which is death and eternal condemnation. No one is exempt. No one is good enough to earn or merit God's favour by supposed works of righteousness, good deeds, or anything else. No one can bring that which is clean out of that which is totally polluted or corrupted. Those who are morally polluted cannot expect their righteous acts (so-called) to be acceptable to God. Those who are spiritually dead cannot expect to bring forth spiritually acceptable fruit for God. As things stand, all mankind is totally lost. (Job 14:4; 15:14-16; Isa. 64:6; Eph. 2:1-3)

Except, then, for God's immediate intervention in love, grace and mercy, the entire human race must ultimately perish—and perish for all eternity.

## The Purpose of the Law

### **Romans 3:19-20**

Paul has just concluded his argument for the depravity of all mankind by quoting from the OT Scriptures—or, 'the law'. In this instance, the apostle's use of the phrase, 'the law', in the following passage must refer to the Psalms and prophetic writings from which he had just quoted, and not the Mosaic Law specifically. This more general use of 'the law' to mean the whole Old Testament is used elsewhere in the New Testament.

Thus, in verse 19, Paul writes:

### **Romans 3:19**

*'Those who are under the law'* are all those who break the law—i.e., the entire world of men and women, without any exceptions. Whatever the law says—whatever the Word of God says—it says to those ungodly people; all of whom are transgressors or law-breakers. (Gal. 3:10)

Paul has already proved from the law (or the Scriptures) that there is none righteous, not even one. (v. 10) The law therefore accuses and condemns the entire human race. God's

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Word and God's law convicts everyone of his or her sin. Everyone therefore must stand silent before Almighty God, for all are guilty as charged and inexcusably blameworthy. (Rom. 1:20; 1 Sam. 2:9; Matt. 22:12-13) The whole world must now be held accountable to God. For—for the death of his Son—God will surely require a reckoning, and he will require it of all mankind. (Rom. 2:1,3,12)

However, if the law justly condemns a person because of his sin and unbelief, that same law cannot later serve to pronounce a guilty sinner righteous. That would be contrary to law and to justice. No person, therefore, can ever hope to be considered righteous through observance of the law's demands. For, no matter how sincere or zealous a person may be in keeping the law, his innate sinful nature defiles all his attempts at living a righteous life. And, as the Scripture itself tells us, All our righteous acts are as filthy rags—totally unacceptable to God. (Isa. 64:2) Thus, in verse 20, the apostle declares:

### Romans 3:20

This verse proves conclusively that no-one can ever be justified in God's sight through his observance of the law. As the Psalmist says:

*2 Do not bring your servant into judgment,  
for no-one living is righteous before you. (Ps. 143:2 NIV)*

(To be 'declared righteous' is a judicial or forensic term. It is an act whereby a judge—in this case, God—pronounces a person 'not guilty' or righteous, and by that legal pronouncement he justifies that person and clears him of all charges formerly laid against him. That person is, thereafter, considered just in the eyes of the Lord (although, in this life, God does not make him inwardly or inherently just or righteous). Paul will deal with this subject much more fully in due course.)

No one, however, will be declared righteous, or justified, in God's sight by observing the law. Indeed, considering the law in its more restricted sense as the summary of God's commands, we can see that no one has or can fulfil even this law: For the greatest commandment of the law is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind; and to love our neighbour as ourselves. (Matt. 22:37-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18)

If, in accordance with God's law, we loved our neighbour as ourselves, then love would do no harm to our neighbour. But all mankind has wronged not only their neighbour, but also their God by failing to love God as he ought—and as God's law requires. Therefore, on this ground alone, God's law justly condemns all mankind. (Rom. 13:8-10)

*20a Therefore, no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law...  
(NIV)*

What, then, is the purpose of the law? The law was given to reveal God's perfect standard of righteousness, or moral and ethical standards of behaviour and attitudes for all mankind. This is expressed summarily as '*the glory of God.*' (Rom. 3:23)

The law was also given to act as the rule of conduct for all mankind.

Primarily, however, the purpose of God's law was to demonstrate to fallen mankind that he was incapable of attaining to God's standard of perfect righteousness as revealed in his law. God gave his law to show and prove to all mankind that they are sinners. He gave his law to convict men and women of their sin and guilt in the sight of the Most Holy God whose law they had failed to keep. In addition, God gave his law to condemn fallen mankind's unrighteous behaviour and attitudes. (Jas. 2:10)

God, therefore, never intended his law to act as an instrument of salvation, but as the instrument that showed mankind his utter sinfulness and total helplessness before God.

God intended his holy and righteous law to drive sinful mankind to seek his abundant mercy, and to call upon his name for forgiveness and salvation.

## Righteousness from God

### ***Romans 3:21-26***

However, if a person could not attain righteousness through doing his best to keep God's law, where was true righteousness to be found? If a person could not earn the favour of God by righteous acts, on what basis would God accept a condemned sinner? These questions Paul begins to answer from verse 21:

### **Romans 3:21**

Paul has just proved that trying to achieve righteousness by keeping God's law is impossible. No one is able to attain to the righteous standard God requires, or to be justified in his sight by attempting to observe the law. For everyone who does not keep the law *completely*, stands condemned by the law for his failure. (Jas. 2:10) However, if fallen and sinful mankind cannot attain righteousness by his own efforts, how can he be counted righteous before God? How can he be saved?

In the passage that follows, God's Word provides the answer. Since mankind cannot earn or merit his own righteousness, he must be provided with righteousness from another source. That source is God—and the righteousness he provides comes to everyone who has faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, as Paul declared in chapter 1 of this epistle:

*17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,<sup>[2]</sup> just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." {Hab. 2:4} (Rom. 1:17 NIV; see also v.16)*

This righteousness comes to sinful mankind directly from God. It comes to repentant sinners apart from any observance of the law on their part, and without regard to the law's demands. However, it comes to sinful human beings only through faith: faith in Christ, as proclaimed in the gospel.

There is nothing intrinsically new about God imputing righteousness by faith, rather than by works. This has always been God's method of justifying the ungodly. As we shall see later, Abraham was declared righteous in God's sight through faith. So, too, was every one of God's people. (Gen. 15:6; Isa. 61:10; Heb. 11:4)

Paul declares that the Law and the Prophets (here put for the whole of the OT Scriptures) bear witness to this essential truth. In Romans 1:17, the apostle had just quoted the prophet Habakkuk who says, "*The righteous will live by faith.*" (Hab. 2:4) We only need to consider other passages of the OT, such as the Psalms, to see how God's people were justified and lived by faith.

Paul expands on the importance of faith in the next verse, where he writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Or is from faith to faith [NIV footnote to Rom. 1:17]

### Romans 3:22a

A sinner, therefore, obtains righteousness before God by accepting from God the gift of righteousness that he himself provides. God, however, does not provide this gift automatically to all of sinful mankind. Rather, each individual man and woman must receive this gift by faith—faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Lord Jesus is the Saviour of all those who call upon his name. The righteousness that comes from God, then, is given to all those who believe on the Son of God—but to no one else. (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9)

In verses 22b and 23, the apostle continues:

### Romans 3:22b-23

As far as the sinfulness of mankind is concerned, there is absolutely no distinction between one person and another, or between one nation and another. Jew and Gentile alike stand on the same level. All alike are sinners before God. All alike are abiding under his wrath and condemnation. (Rom. 1:28 - 2:1; 3:9-20)

This does not mean that all people are guilty of the same sins, or that all have descended to the same level of depravity or wickedness. It means simply that everyone without exception has sinned. Everyone without exception falls short of God's glory. He fails to attain to God's righteous and glorious standard, and consequently he fails to win the approval and praise of God on his life. (Cf. Heb. 4:1; see also Isa. 42:21)

However, having shown that there is no difference, and that all fall short of God's glory, the apostle then immediately adds in verse 24:

### Romans 3:24

All alike are sinners. All alike fall short of God's perfect standard, and of his approval and praise. But, they are justified—justified freely by God's grace...

Here, we must observe a distinction between those referred to a moment ago, and those referred to now. When it says that all alike are sinners, and all alike fall short of God's glory, this clearly refers to the entire human race—as Paul has just proved. However, when it says that they are justified freely by his grace, this no longer applies to the entire human race, but only to those who—by God's grace—have exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul has already stated this in verse 22, and he will do so again throughout this epistle.

We have established, therefore, that God justifies by his grace everyone who believes on his Son; and that he does this freely. However, how is this justification provided? On what basis can a just and holy God justify ungodly sinners?

God does it by means of redemption. In this case, as frequently elsewhere in the Scriptures, to redeem is to deliver by payment of a price or ransom. Here, the type of ransom provided also makes full satisfaction to justice. This redemption came by Jesus Christ. He paid the ransom, or the price required for our redemption. This included his complete obedience to the law, culminating in the sacrifice of his own perfect life. Christ did this to redeem sinners from the bondage and curse of the law, and from all its demands upon them. The holy, sinless Son of God satisfied every demand of God's righteous law by assuming in his own Person the penalty due to the sinner. (Titus 2:14)

To this end, Paul writes in verse 25:



**Romans 3:25**

God set forth his own sinless Son as a sacrifice for sin. As the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God, Jesus made a sacrifice that would be effectual for all time, and efficacious for people of all generations of humanity, from the creation to the end of this present age.

However, Christ did not only die as a sacrificial offering for sin, but specifically as a sacrifice designed to make atonement for sin. He died not only to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, but also to turn away the just wrath of God from the sinner (bearing that wrath himself), and to reconcile the redeemed and forgiven sinner to God. (1 John 2:2; 4:10) This atonement was effected through the shedding of Christ's blood—the yielding up of his perfect and righteous life on the sinner's behalf. It was, therefore, a *vicarious* or *substitutionary* atonement—one made on behalf of others.

All those who believe on Christ's person and work on their behalf, receive all the benefits of that atonement. His blood cleanses them from all sin and—through their faith—they are reckoned to be righteous in the eyes of the Lord. They have been clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness. This is the righteousness that God imputes to them as a gift of his grace—through faith in his Son.

By thus providing a sacrifice of atonement for sinners, God has provided a perfect satisfaction to the demands of justice. He has not overlooked the demands of the law concerning sin; but by yielding up his own Son as a substitute for sinners, he has fulfilled or paid every demand of his just and holy law. (Rom. 5:9-11)

This also satisfies the demands of justice in respect of all those whom God forgave and justified before the coming of Christ: i.e. all those who lived under the OT economy. During that time, atonement was typified through regular animal sacrifices. However, the shedding of the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. They merely covered it until the time when God would provide an ultimate and perfect sacrifice. (Heb. 10:1-4) When Christ came, however, the sacrifice he made on the cross, fully atoned for all the sins committed in these past ages, as well as for all the sins committed at the present and in the future. Thus, again, the demands of the law upon sinners of the OT era have been fully met in Christ. Thus, too, God's forbearance in passing over punishment until Christ came is vindicated fully. For he himself bore that punishment in his own body on the tree. (1 Pet. 2:24)

In verse 26, Paul continues:

**Romans 3:26**

God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, so that every believing sinner may receive the forgiveness of sins. This demonstrates the justice of God. It demonstrates that God does not overlook sin or acquit the guilty. It demonstrates that a holy, just and righteous God must ensure that the penalty of sin is paid—and paid in full. (Nahum 1:3) This Christ did when he paid redemption's price for our sins. He paid in full the penalty due to the sinner, thus satisfying God's justice and demonstrating his justice to the world.

Thus, God clears the guilty sinner only on the basis of an atoning sacrifice made on his behalf. That atonement must involve the shedding of blood; i.e. the sacrifice of a perfect, sinless life—given up in death—on behalf of the sinner. (Heb. 9:22-28) God provided this atonement for sinners through the sacrifice of his only beloved Son. Thus, God is seen not only to be just in himself, but also as the one who has the perfect right to justify all those who believe in his Son, and who seek salvation through faith in him.

## Grace Excludes Boasting

### **Romans 3:27-30**

However, if sinners can be forgiven only through faith in the atoning sacrifice that God has provided, what credit can the sinner claim before God? The answer is 'None'—'none whatsoever'. Far from being in any sense praiseworthy in God's sight, the sinner is polluted, culpable and totally dependent on God for grace and mercy toward him. He is completely indebted to God. The sinner can bring nothing but his sinfulness to God. He can come only as he is—receiving from God the gift of righteousness that he freely offers, through faith in his Son.

Thus, in verse 27, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 3:27**

God's grace toward wrath-deserving sinners leaves no room for self-congratulation or boasting on the sinner's part. The sinner can offer nothing acceptable to God. He can only approach God as he is—and through his Son—seeking his grace and mercy. Thus boasting about self-worth, merit, or anything else, is excluded.

However, on what principle, or by what rule, is boasting excluded?

Boasting is excluded because it is connected with merit or self-achievement. It is excluded because it is related to fallen mankind's futile attempts to attain righteousness through the law—the same law that condemns him as a sinner. It is excluded because there is nothing at all that a sinful person can do to earn his own salvation, or to contribute toward the granting of that salvation (vv. 19-20). Thus, sinners have absolutely no grounds for boasting when salvation is freely offered to them as a gift of God's grace. He has no grounds for boasting because God's free gift of salvation can only be received by faith—and faith, too, is a gift of God. (Ezek. 16:63; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8-10)

In verse 28, Paul continues:

### **Romans 3:28**

We apostles insist that God justifies a person by his faith. All those who believe on Christ are justified or pronounced righteous in God's sight, quite apart from observing the law. (Acts 13:38-39; Gal. 2:16; 3:11-14)

In verses 29 and 30, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 3:29-30**

In relation to justification, it may be asked whether God is the God of the Jews only, or also of the Gentiles. Clearly, since all mankind has sinned and fallen short of God's glory, all alike must be justified if they are to be reconciled to God. In addition, since there is only one true God, then all sinners—Jew and Gentile—must be justified by that one God. (Rom. 1:16; 10:12-13)

However, on what basis must they be justified or pronounced righteous before God? On the basis of faith: faith alone in Christ alone through God's grace alone. This has been clearly established already. God justifies the circumcision (the Jews) and the uncircumcision (the Gentiles) by faith. The object of that faith is Jesus, the Son of God.

## Faith Upholds the Law

Paul concludes this chapter by asking in verse 31:

### Romans 3:31

To many people, it must have seemed that what Paul was saying about faith, devalued or nullified God's holy and righteous law. What was the purpose of the law, if by a person's sincere attempts at observing it, he still could not be saved? Why the law, if a person could not—by careful observance of the law—attain to a righteousness which would commend him to God?

We know, of course, that no one is able to keep the law or to meet all its demands. Not even the most morally sincere and upright person on earth can attain to God's righteous standards laid down in his law.

However, the fact that justification is by faith and not by law, does not devalue or nullify the law. Why not? Because it was never the purpose of the law to save anyone. The only way a person could be saved through observing the law was if he kept it perfectly in every detail from the very beginning of his life to the very end. Moreover, assuming he could be justified in this manner, the person would need to keep God's law perfectly—in thought, word and deed. Even then, however, atonement would still have to be made for that person's fallen, sinful nature—the nature conveyed to him at birth. If, however, that person failed to observe the law in even one point, then he became a law-breaker. In effect, he would become guilty of breaking all of it, since he had failed to keep it entirely. (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:9-10)

Clearly, then, no one could be justified through observing the law—the sum of which is to love God perfectly, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Only Christ obeyed the law perfectly—and he did so not only for himself, but also for us who believe on him. (Matt. 5:17-18)

The purpose of the law was not to save or justify, but to condemn sin and to show to all mankind that they could never attain to the standards that God's law required. By exposing their sin and need, the law was intended to drive men and women to seek the Lord's mercy. It was to highlight their guilt and helplessness before God, inducing them to seek help in God's love, mercy and compassion. (Rom. 7:7)

The law, therefore, had an essential purpose in convicting sinners of their sin and need of redemption. This conviction was effected not only by their conscience, but also by the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds. Thus, sinners were compelled to see their danger while remaining under the just wrath of God. Thus, too, they were encouraged to seek the salvation of the Lord, in order to deliver them from condemnation and eternal punishment.

Far from nullifying the law, then, faith magnifies the law by recognising its place in God's plan of salvation. The law presents God's standards of righteousness and thereby magnifies and glorifies his holy name. In addition, God's law acts as a signpost identifying and condemning sin, and pointing sinners to the one and only Saviour. Thus, faith upholds the law. It vindicates the place and purpose of God's law since it directs the sinner to seek salvation—not through the law—but through faith. (Gal. 3:19-24)

Thus, in every respect, we see that God's law is holy, righteous and good. (Rom. 7:12)



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## Romans Chapter 4

### Abraham Justified by Faith

#### **Romans 4:1-12**

#### **Romans 4:1-8**

Paul has established the principle of justification by faith. Now, by citing the example of Abraham, the apostle proceeds to show that this is indeed God's method of justifying the ungodly.

Abraham was the forefather of the Hebrew nation. It was to him that all the Jews traced their ancestry. However, Jewish rabbinical teaching declared that Abraham earned his righteousness in the sight of God. Paul is now about to refute this kind of teaching with its distorted emphasis on works or works plus faith. To do so, the apostle will use the same OT Scriptures as did the rabbis—but he will let the Scriptures speak for themselves.

We must remember, of course, that Paul had once been a zealous Pharisee. Raised, as he was, at the feet of Gamaliel, a highly respected Rabbi, Paul would have been thoroughly versed in rabbinical theology and methodology. The apostle is not, however, about to rely on such methods here. Rather, he is about to prove from the Scriptures how God justified Abraham or reckoned him righteous in his sight. Thus, in chapter 4 verse 1, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 4:1**

Many Jews, of course, objected strongly to Paul's line of argument—even although he was presenting the truths of God's Word, and was speaking by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. Like many people today, the proud Jews could not accept that they could do nothing by way of works or righteous acts to earn their salvation, or at least to win God's approval and blessing. They resented the idea that they were sinners, and that—as such—they were dependent wholly on God's grace for mercy and forgiveness. They believed that those only whom they considered especially wicked (such as the ungodly Gentiles) could rightly be termed 'sinners'. Indeed, the Jews depended very much on their physical descent from Abraham, and on observing the rite of circumcision, to commend them to God. (Luke 7:39; 19:7; John 8:33-47)

This, however, contrasted sharply with the way in which Abraham himself was considered righteous before God. If Abraham discovered anything in relation to justification before God, it was that a person does not win God's approval by works, or attain righteousness by what he does. Rather, as will be seen from the passage under consideration, Abraham discovered that God justifies those who accept his word and his promises unreservedly and unconditionally. (Gen. 15:1-6)

Is there then no place for righteous acts or good deeds before God?

No amount of good works, good deeds, or 'righteous' acts can ever commend a sinner to God. This is because—no matter how well intentioned, or sincerely performed—these works or deeds proceed from an impure, unregenerate and unforgiven heart and life. Thus, we can never be justified in God's sight by our good works or by our attempts to observe God's law.

## Expository Notes

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For those people, however, who—by God’s grace—have been justified, and who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, then good deeds are an essential evidence of their new birth and new life in Christ. These works are the fruit of the Spirit. However, only regenerated believers can produce the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is an element of the believer’s ongoing sanctification.

Paul will deal with the fruits of a sanctified life in due course. Now, however, the apostle is speaking only of how God justifies a sinner, or of how he takes an undeserving sinner and reckons him righteous in his sight.

Returning to the example of Abraham, Paul writes in verse 2:

### Romans 4:2

If, indeed, Abraham had achieved his justification by what he did, or by how he lived, then he would have had something about which to boast. However, he could certainly not boast about it before God. For, according to God’s own Word, all our righteous acts—all our best intentions and endeavours—are like filthy rags in his sight. (Isa. 64:6) Whatever ‘righteousness’ Abraham may have achieved by his own efforts, that righteousness (so-called) was certainly not acceptable to God.

Had he felt so disposed, Abraham may have boasted about his own upright life before men—but not before God. To God—before his regeneration and justification—Abraham was still a sinner. He had failed to fulfil the requirements of God’s law as revealed to him, or written on his conscience. Abraham, therefore, could not be regarded as righteous or justified by his works. (Eph. 2:9) But the Scripture does not say that Abraham was justified by his works. (James’ reference to such an event applies to a much later stage in Abraham’s life—at least 14 years after God had justified Abraham by faith.) Thus, in verse 3, Paul asks:

### Romans 4:3

{Cf. Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22}

Concerning Abraham’s justification before God, the Word of God plainly attests to the fact that Abraham was justified or reckoned righteous by faith. (Gen. 15:6) God had promised to give to Abraham a son and heir; even when both Abraham and Sarah were well advanced in years and Sarah was past childbearing age. The Lord promised to make of Abraham a great nation, through which the LORD would bless every nation on earth. Although (humanly speaking) these promises seemed utterly impossible of fulfilment, Abraham *believed God’s Word*. For that simple act of believing his Word, God credited Abraham with righteousness. This, therefore, illustrates how Abraham was justified—by faith. (Gen. 15:1-6; Gal. 3:6-9)

This, however, does not mean that God accepted Abraham’s faith as a substitute for complete obedience to his law. To begin with, God’s law of commandments had not yet been given. Again, if God had intended to justify Abraham because of obedience to his commands, he could have done so much earlier. For instance, had justification been based on obedience to God’s commands, the LORD could have justified Abraham for obeying the command to leave Ur of the Chaldees, and journeying to the land that God would show him. Yet, God did not justify Abraham because of his obedience—necessary as that obedience was—but because of his faith.

We should note, of course, that Abraham’s obedience in leaving his native land to go where God sent him, was in itself an action that demonstrated complete faith in God. Again, we should note that faith is not the *grounds* of a sinner’s justification before God. It is merely the *instrument* or *means* through which a sinner is justified. Faith *receives* what



God *gives*. If God gives a solemn promise, faith receives that promise as absolutely true, and believes it. If God gives the promise of salvation to those who accept it as a gift, faith receives that gift from the hand of God. Abraham, therefore, was justified by faith—faith in what God's Word said.

In verse 4, the apostle contrasts faith with works:

#### **Romans 4:4**

When a person works, the payment he receives for his labour is not a gift. Rather, it is the reward or remuneration rightly due to that person for the work he has performed. This, however, was not the case concerning Abraham. Abraham did not work to earn God's righteousness, and then receive it as his due reward. On the contrary—and quite apart from any works on Abraham's part—God credited righteousness to Abraham *as a gift*. (Cf. Rom. 9:31-32)

To this end, Paul writes in verse 5:

#### **Romans 4:5**

This confirms what has just been said. A person's works does not earn righteousness from God. Rather, faith is the instrument by which a sinner is reckoned righteous before God. We must remember, of course, that we are speaking here of the righteousness that comes directly from God: the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Rom. 3:21-22) The righteousness that God himself provides for the repentant and believing sinner is the only righteousness that is acceptable in his sight. In addition, this righteousness from God is the only righteousness that can justify a person.

We note from verse 5 that everyone who thus trusts in God is justified. However, until—by faith—God counts them righteous in his sight, they remain in their unregenerate and wicked state. This applies to everyone who has not been justified—from the vilest offender to the most sincere and morally 'upright' person on earth. They remain alienated from God, under his wrath, and wicked in his sight.

When, however, they repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God justifies them. No matter what kind of people they were previously, God reckons them righteous through their faith in Christ and in his atoning sacrifice on their behalf. This does not mean that God has removed their sinful nature, or that he has infused righteousness into them. When God justifies a person, he declares or pronounces them righteous in his sight. Justification, however, does not *make* a person inwardly and actually righteous. In and of itself, it does not alter their character and conduct. The process of *making* the believer inwardly and actually righteous (or of altering his character and conduct to conform to that of Christ) is known as sanctification (not justification).

Unlike justification, which is a once-for-all declarative *act*, the sanctification of the believer is a life-long *process*. Throughout his or her life, the Spirit of grace and of holiness is daily sanctifying every believer. Now that the Lord has redeemed and forgiven them, they can rejoice and consider themselves blessed that the Lord has shown such mercy to undeserving sinners. (Rom. 5:1-2)

To this end, Paul says in verses 6 to 8 concerning the Psalmist, David:

### **Romans 4:6-8**

{Cf. Psalm 32:1,2}

David, too, speaks of the blessedness of those whom God has justified by faith and whose sins he has forgiven. In this Psalm, David does not say—in so many words—that God credits righteousness apart from works. Nevertheless, this, clearly, is what he means and implies. True blessedness comes only to those whose sins are forgiven, and forgiveness of sins comes only to those who repent and trust in God.

David knows this from his own personal experience. He knows very well that no amount of good deeds or sacrifices and offerings could atone for his sins. Only a contrite, repentant, and believing heart could lead to a person's justification before God. Only a broken but trusting heart could experience peace with God, through the assurance of sins forgiven. (Ps. 51:16-17) Only under these circumstances could David speak of the blessedness of those whose sins God has forgiven. Only in this situation could he rejoice in the absolute certainty that the Lord would never count his sins against him.

## **Does God Justify Only the Circumcised?**

### **Romans 4:9-12**

So far, Paul has been speaking only of Jews whom God had justified—Abraham and David. This may lead someone to conclude that God's method of justification for Jews does not apply to Gentiles. Paul begins to address this issue in verse 9a:

#### **Romans 4:9a**

The Jews believed that they alone had a claim to God's kingdom. They thought that they alone—the circumcised—could inherit God's promised blessings. Yes, it was not unknown for non-Jews (or Gentiles) to seek the salvation of the LORD. However, to Jewish thinking, if such a person did not convert to Judaism and if he did not observe the rite of circumcision, then he had no part or lot in God's kingdom. Nor could he ever hope to share in the blessings promised to Abraham.

However, is this the case? Paul responds to this common line of argument in verses 9b and 10, where he writes:

#### **Romans 4:9b-10**

The answer to whether or not Abraham was circumcised before God justified him, determines whether or not a person can be justified apart from circumcision. If apart from circumcision, of course, this means apart from obedience to any of God's laws, rules or regulations—for circumcision was an ordinance commanded by God.

The Jews, of course—and Judaistic legalisers within the church—insisted that obedience was an essential pre-requisite to justification (and salvation). Thus, to counter their arguments effectively, Paul examines Abraham's situation closely; for the patriarch's example will determine the matter one way or the other.

Upon investigation of the relevant OT passages, it becomes unmistakably clear that—when God credited righteousness to Abraham for his faith—Abraham was still uncircumcised. Thus, his justification came through faith alone—quite apart from obedience to God's commands. Indeed, at this stage, God had not yet commanded Abraham to ob-

serve the rite of circumcision. Where, then, does circumcision fit into the picture? Paul answers this in the next few verses:

#### **Romans 4:11a**

Here, it is evident that Abraham observed the rite of circumcision *after* God had justified him. Thus, Abraham could not have been justified *because* of his circumcision. Indeed, when God justified Abraham by faith, he was still uncircumcised—and in that respect, like a Gentile. Thus, if God could justify one uncircumcised person through faith, then he can justify any number of uncircumcised people through faith.

Later, God commanded Abraham to circumcise all the males in his household. This was the outward sign and seal of the LORD's covenant with Abraham and his seed. This outward sign and seal was a demonstration of the righteousness that Abraham already had by faith. Thus, circumcision indicated that God had justified Abraham by faith, and that he was now the beneficiary of God's covenant. (Gen. 17:1-27; see also Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:28-29)

Thus, too, all those in Abraham's household who were circumcised, were considered as partakers of the same covenant God had made with Abraham, and believers in the same God—the God of Abraham. Those male children of Abraham's household whom he circumcised in obedience to God's command were also considered as included in God's covenant with Abraham. At a later stage, however, the children would need to place their faith and trust in God personally.

From this, it is evident that God justifies everyone who has faith—whether circumcised or not. Thus, in verses 11b and 12, the apostle Paul writes:

#### **Romans 4:11b-12**

The Jews claimed that Abraham was their father, and consequently they alone could inherit the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham, and the promises attached to that covenant. Manifestly, however, their reasoning on this point was inaccurate. God established his covenant with Abraham on the basis of faith. Circumcision was the sign or seal of the covenant already established. That covenant embraced all those Jews who—like Abraham—believed in God, and whom God justified by faith (v.16; Heb. 11:11-12).

Although a number of material and temporal blessings attended it, God's covenant with Abraham was principally a spiritual covenant. As such, it included not only all believing and justified Jews, but also all truly believing and justified Gentiles. (The One, of course, who unites the two groups in a single body is Christ.) (Gal. 3:28-29) Thus, Abraham is not the father of the Jews merely because of biological or physical descent. Rather, he is the father of all those—Jews and Gentiles alike—who are his spiritual children: All those, that is, whom God has reckoned righteous by faith, and who continue to live by faith—as did Abraham. (Rom. 9:6-8; Matt. 8:11-12; Gal. 3:6-7)

### **Justification by Faith**

#### **Romans 4:13-25**

##### **Romans 4:13**

On what basis did God promise to make of Abraham a great nation, through whom he would bless all people on earth? On what basis could God say to Abraham that through him and his promised seed, he would be heir of the world? (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:4-6) Was it

based on Abraham's works, his obedience to God's commands, or his morally upright life?

Absolutely not! If it were, Abraham would never have received the promised blessing. For, although he was a man of faith, Abraham's works and righteous acts were by no means perfect in God's sight. Again, if Abraham received the promise through the principle of law keeping, then there would be no need for faith. Abraham would have earned the blessing as a reward. As it is, however, Abraham did not earn these promises. Rather, and by his own sovereign grace and mercy, God granted these promises to Abraham through his faith. Abraham received from God the promise of being the spiritual father of the world (i.e. of all believers) through the righteousness credited to him by faith.

Concerning the effect that the law would have had on the promised blessings, Paul writes in verses 14 and 15:

### **Romans 4:14-15**

If a person becomes an heir of God's promises through keeping laws or through the principle of obedience to rules and regulations, then there is no place for faith. If by law, then the promise is no longer a gift granted on the basis of faith or trust. Rather, it is a reward earned for works performed. If this is so, then faith is worthless, and so are the promises based on faith. (Cf. Gal. 3:18-22)

This, however, is not the case. A person cannot inherit God's promises or God's blessings through keeping laws—simply because he cannot keep these laws perfectly, as God requires. Thus, because of his failure in this respect, the law condemns him and brings God's wrath upon him for breaking the law. (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10)

Without some system of law, or principle of law, there would be no transgression. Apart from a guilty and accusing conscience, there would be no clear-cut law to highlight sin and condemn the transgressor. (Here, 'law' is taken to include not only a code of ethics or set of written laws, but also the law—or principle—of right and wrong that God has written on every person's heart or conscience.) (Rom. 1:18-20; 3:19-20) Since, however, these principles of law exist, all mankind stands condemned by the written law and by his conscience as a law-breaker.

In verse 16, the apostle Paul continues:

### **Romans 4:16**

Since it cannot come through perfectly keeping the law, God's promises and God's blessings must come by grace through faith. They are not based on a person's ability to observe the law of commandments. Nor—since the Mosaic Law did not exist at this time—does it come through observing any general principle of law or obedience.

No one has the ability to keep the law perfectly, or to obey perfectly. Nevertheless, by his unmerited grace, God bestows his promised blessings on all those who have faith in his Word. These believers are Abraham's true offspring—a spiritual offspring. This offspring comprises seed from every nation on earth. Thus, Abraham was indeed the heir of the world. God guarantees this blessing through faith, to every one of Abraham's true children—whether originally of Jewish descent or not. Everyone who has faith—as Abraham had—receives the blessings that God, in his grace, has promised. This includes the gift of righteousness (vv. 11-13).

Abraham, therefore, is the father of all believers, and they are his true offspring. They are the children of Abraham—the children whom God has raised up. This is the offspring promised by God to Abraham from among all nations. (Rom. 9:7-8; Gal. 3:7-9; Matt. 3:9)

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To this end, Paul writes in verse 17:

**Romans 4:17**

{Cf. Gen. 17:5}

God had promised to make of Abraham a father of many nations. This became true in the *physical* sense, both through Ishmael and his descendants, and also through the promised son, Isaac, and his descendants. (Gen. 17:1-7,16,20)

God's covenant with Abraham, however, had a *spiritual* rather than a physical basis. God established his covenant with Abraham and his offspring on the basis of Abraham's faith. Thus, Abraham is the spiritual father of all who have a like kind of faith in God, and who live by faith and obedience to his will. (Gen. 15:1-6; Heb. 11:8-16) In this regard, Abraham is the father of all faithful and believing Jews of the OT economy. Similarly, under the NT economy, Abraham is the father of all those who have faith in God through the Lord Jesus Christ—the promised Seed or Messiah. Since this applies to believers from every nation on earth, this demonstrates the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham to make him the father of many nations.

At the time God made this promise to Abraham, Isaac—through whom the promise would be fulfilled—had not yet been born. Indeed, humanly speaking, it appeared that Abraham's wife Sarah was too old to conceive and bear children. (For this reason, Sarah persuaded Abraham to father a child by her maid, Hagar. This child, however, was not the child God had promised to Abraham.)

With God, however, nothing is impossible. He gives life to the dead. He calls things that are not as though they were. At his word of command—or by a demonstration of his almighty power—the LORD made the heavens and the earth. By that same almighty power, he created living beings and set them upon the earth. Although Sarah was very old and considered barren, this presented no difficulty to the LORD of creation. The one who created the human body with all its vital organs and properties, could restore an ageing body to health and vitality by the exercise of his power. (Thus, by a word of command—or by a demonstration of his almighty power—Jesus restored withered limbs to life, and raised Lazarus from death to life.)

The same God who gives life and vitality can reverse or override the ageing processes. If required, he can restore withered organs in order to accomplish his purposes. The Lord Jesus restoring sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, muscular strength to the lame, and hearing to the deaf exemplifies this. God had promised Sarah a son—and Sarah would surely bear a son. From that son (Isaac) would come the entire people of Israel, including the Seed promised after the fall of man. Through this Seed—the Messiah or Anointed One—all nations on earth would be blessed. Thus, in relation to his humanity, the Lord Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. (Gen. 17:16-21; 18:10-14)

God promised, and Abraham believed. To this end, Paul writes in verse 18:

### **Romans 4:18**

{Cf. Gen. 15:5}

Although, humanly speaking, the situation seemed impossible since both Abraham and Sarah were well advanced in years, Abraham believed God's promise. Humanly speaking, Abraham had absolutely no grounds for hoping he could have a son. He certainly could put no confidence in the flesh. However, with an assured hope and complete confidence in the power and faithfulness of God, Abraham believed that God would fulfil his word.

God honoured Abraham's faith. The LORD did indeed give Abraham a son by his wife, Sarah. Thus Isaac was born. Through Isaac, Abraham was to become not only the father of the Jewish nation, but also the one through whom the promised Seed or Messiah would come. Again, through the Messiah, God would bless all nations on earth. Individuals from every nation under heaven that believed on the Christ would become Abraham's true (spiritual) offspring. In this way, God would fulfil his promise to Abraham to make him the father of many nations.

Certainly, in the purely physical sense, it is true that Abraham was also the father or progenitor of several nations other than the Jewish nation. (Gen. 17:20; 25:1-4; 12-18) However, God's promise to make Abraham the heir of the world could only be fulfilled on a much larger scale: i.e. through his spiritual children. All believers are Abraham's spiritual children. They all belong to Christ; the promised Seed—and they have been drawn from every nation under heaven. (Gal. 3:7-9)

In verse 19, Paul continues:

### **Romans 4:19**

This shows the degree of Abraham's confidence in God, and the extent of his trust in God's promise to give him a son. Many years had passed since God had first made this promise to Abraham. Abraham was now about 100 years old, and his wife, Sarah was about 90 years old. Yet, Abraham did not weaken in his faith. He continued to trust in God, and believe the impossible because God had promised to accomplish it. (Heb. 11:11-13)

The statement that Abraham did not weaken in his faith does not mean that he never entertained the slightest doubts, or that his faith did not waver momentarily. The Scriptures tell us otherwise. As a rule, however, Abraham remained steadfast in his faith—believing that God would do what he said. (Gen. 17:17; see also Gen. 18:11-14) Thus, Paul can write:

### **Romans 4:20-21**

Although, on occasions, Abraham doubted momentarily, he never permitted these doubts to gain a foothold in his mind or to influence his confidence in God. As a rule, whenever such doubts entered his mind, Abraham dealt with them by turning again to the sure and certain promise of God. Thus, by constantly setting his mind on God's infallible Word, Abraham did not ultimately waver through unbelief. Instead, by believing the promise God had made, his faith became stronger. The more he hoped in God and trusted in God, the more he was disposed to give God the glory—the God with whom nothing can ever be impossible. (Cf. Jer. 32:27; Luke 1:36-37,45) Thus, Abraham was convinced that God had the power to accomplish what he had promised.

In verse 22, the apostle Paul adds:

**Romans 4:22**

(Cf. v.3)

Thus we see that Abraham was justified or credited with righteousness by his faith. This whole account of his complete trust in God and in his Word shows unmistakably that Abraham had to depend on God's grace entirely, and that his faith was reckoned as righteousness. Nothing Abraham did by way of good works or obedient acts could have accomplished the impossible. He could only trust God completely for the production of life from the dead.

So it is with those who are spiritually dead. No amount of good deeds or good works can produce in them the new spiritual birth. Only the power of God can do this—acting through the Holy Spirit. However, those who are dead spiritually (just as Abraham's body was dead physically) must trust entirely in God's grace to create new spiritual life in their souls. Then, through faith, they are credited with the righteousness that comes from God. To this end, Paul writes in verses 23 and 24:

**Romans 4:23-24**

Abraham is our example: Just as Abraham was justified in the sight of God, so is every one else justified in God's sight. Abraham was justified purely by the grace of God, through faith in the Word of God. Likewise, everyone else is justified entirely by God's grace, through faith in his Word. (Cf. Rom. 15:4)

Concerning the message of justification, what does God's Word say? All those who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved. (Acts 2:38-39; Rom. 10:4-13; Mark 16:16) Everyone, therefore, who believes that Christ died for their sins and rose again for their justification, will be reckoned righteous before God and will receive the gift of spiritual and eternal life. Thus, the apostle concludes this chapter by saying in verse 25:

**Romans 4:25**

In fulfilment of the Scriptures, and in accordance with God's plan and purposes, Jesus was delivered into the hands of sinful men. They accused him falsely, and then handed him over to be crucified. (Matt. 26:53-54; Luke 24:7,20; Acts 2:23)

Nevertheless, no-one took Jesus' life from him. The Lord laid down his life voluntarily on the cross; as he had always intended when he came into the world. The Holy One of God yielded up his life voluntarily to his Father, in order to make atonement for sin and to secure everlasting righteousness for all his people: i.e., all truly regenerated believers. (John 10:17-18; Dan. 9:24) Thus, when Christ lived a perfect sinless life, he did so not only on his own account, but also for us—in order to fulfil the law's demands upon us for a perfectly righteous life. (Rom. 5:6-10) Again, when Christ suffered and died on the tree, he did not do so on his own account (for no punishment was due to him) but on our account—in order to pay the law's penalty (death) for us sinners. (Isa. 53:5-6; Rom. 3:25; 8:3-4)

Yet again, when Christ rose from the dead by the almighty power of God, he did so to demonstrate conclusively that God had accepted his vicarious and atoning sacrifice. By his resurrection, the Lord Jesus secured our justification before God and reconciliation with God as his own redeemed children. Again, by his resurrection and ascension to his Father's own right hand, the glorified and exalted Lord Jesus continues to intercede for the saints (the redeemed people of God). One day, he will return from there in celestial power and glory to gather all his loved ones home. (Rom. 8:33-34; Heb. 9:28)

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## Romans Chapter 5

### Christ Died for the Ungodly

#### **Romans 5:1-11**

Having shown the universality of sin and the fact of justification by faith, the apostle is now about to discuss the effects on the life of every regenerated and justified believer. To begin with, Paul concentrates on effects that relate more directly to justification. Later in his epistle, however, he will discuss those effects that relate more directly to sanctification.

Keeping principally to the theme of justification, the apostle begins chapter 5 of Romans by writing:

#### **Romans 5:1**

While we were sinners, we were alienated from God by our 'wicked works' or evil behaviour. This does not necessarily mean that we were extremely wicked or even more sinful than were others. It means that we had fallen short of God's glory, and therefore God's law condemned us as sinners. As such, however, we were God's enemies, and were abiding under God's wrath (v.10; Col. 1:21).

So long as we remained God's enemies, we could not be at peace with God. God was not at peace with us, and we could have no sense of peace in our hearts with God. However, while we were still alienated from God by our sin, God in his grace intervened. He provided an atonement or satisfaction for our sins by sacrificing his own Son for us.

In this way, God secured peace for us through the blood of the cross. Jesus atoned for sin, and he paid in full the penalty due to us by dying on the sinner's behalf. By his triumphant resurrection from death, he provided justification for all those who truly believed on him. (Col. 1:20)

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (NIV)*

Paul continues the sentence in verse 2:

#### **Romans 5:2**

It is by the grace of God that we are now able to stand in his holy presence. Moreover, we stand before God in the full assurance that our hearts are at peace with him through the blood of his Son. Once, we were his enemies. Now, by his grace, we are God's beloved children and heirs. We have a blessed assurance laid up for us in glory, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Through faith, then, we have gained access into this grace—into the very presence of our Father in heaven. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, and who now lives in heaven to intercede for us, we can approach the throne of grace with our prayers and petitions. In addition, for the sake of his Son, and by his grace, God hears our prayers and answers them according to his will. (Heb. 10:19-23)

Paul says that we rejoice in the hope—or certain assurance—of the glory of God. Then, in verses 3 and 4a, the apostle adds:

### Romans 5:3-4a

Paul says that we rejoice in our sufferings (or trials). This does not mean that we take an unhealthy pleasure in suffering for suffering's sake. We are not of those who inflict pain upon their bodies, believing that this produces greater holiness of life or in some way commends a person to God. This is certainly not the meaning of the Scriptures when it speaks of yielding to suffering or rejoicing in suffering. What the apostle means is that we count it an honour when we are called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ's name. Then indeed we are blessed. (Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 5:41) Again, we rejoice in those sufferings or trials that God sees fit to send into our lives to strengthen us or to mould our character. For we know that we are suffering at the hands of a loving heavenly Father who will always act in accordance with his wisdom, and for our own good.

To take an everyday analogy, a person might have to suffer some measure of pain for a while following an operation. This operation, however, has been for the person's own good. Perhaps it was necessary to save his life, or to deliver him from greater pain and suffering later. So it is when the Lord brings suffering into the lives of his beloved children. It is not merely to cause pain, but to deliver from greater pain, and perhaps even loss of life.

Yet again, we rejoice in the sufferings that God brings into our lives because of our own sin and waywardness. For then we know that God has not abandoned us because of our sin—for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines. When, on this account, we suffer pain at the hands of the Lord, we know that it is because we have deserved it and because he loves us. We know that he is disciplining us so that he may not have cause to condemn us along with the world. Rather, God disciplines us so that he may induce us to acknowledge our sin and to seek his mercy and forgiveness. (Heb. 12:4-12)

Thus, in these and other similar forms of suffering, we rejoice because we know that we suffer for the sake of Christ's name, or because God is dealing with us in love. Again, we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance... (v.3b).

Often, we experience suffering or trials at the hand of our loving heavenly Father. Yet, although painful at times, we realise that God disciplines us only for our own good and for his glory. Thus, we rejoice in what we have to endure as God's beloved children. When seen in this light—as a blessing from God—our suffering tends to produce steadfastness or perseverance. It creates within our souls a resolute determination to pursue the course that the Lord has set before us. (Jas. 1:2-4) Of course, we cannot do this in our own strength. Strengthened, however, by our sufferings, and by God's all-sufficient grace, we determine to run the Christian race with patient endurance. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

Thus, in the latter part of verse 4, Paul adds:

### Romans 5:4b

Perseverance includes patience. As we learn to persevere against all difficulties, so also we learn to exercise an increasing amount of patience in coping with, and overcoming, each of these difficulties and trials in our life. (Jas. 1:12) Patience in this regard also helps us to show more kindness, thoughtfulness and patience toward other people. When we experience trials, difficulties and suffering ourselves, it enables us to show greater compassion, understanding and patience to other people in their sufferings and difficulties. Thus, both suffering and perseverance shapes our character. It makes us into the kind of person God wants us to be—provided we do not complain about our sufferings, or resent their intrusion into our lives.

So long as we persevere in the way—despite the sufferings and difficulties—the Lord will make us into the kind of men and women he wants us to be. He does this in order that we might serve and glorify him, and serve one another in humility and love.

When, as a result of our justification by God's grace (and subsequent sanctification), we see our character being strengthened in grace, we are filled with hope. This hope is a full assurance of faith that God will do everything in and to our lives that he has promised. We do not place our confidence, then, on some faltering or wavering hope. Rather, we place it on the hope that we have as an anchor for the soul. Our hope, or assured confidence, is built upon nothing less than the Rock—and that Rock is Christ.

Therefore, in verse 5, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 5:5**

We have absolutely no reason to be ashamed or disappointed in the hope that is ours through Christ Jesus. On the contrary, we know that the one who has established peace between God and ourselves by his atoning sacrifice, is also the one who has gone to heaven's glory to prepare a place for us there.

In addition, God has bestowed upon each of his redeemed children his Holy Spirit to designate us as belonging to him and to seal us to himself for all eternity. Again, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us so that one day we will be ready to inherit the place that is being kept for us in glory. By this same Holy Spirit, God floods our hearts and souls with his everlasting love. And the more we realise that he loves us—unworthy as we are—the more we should be inclined to love him in return, and to love one another.

This is true love: that God so loved us in our sinful condition that he gave his one and only Son to die for us. Now that we know him, we find that his love for us becomes ever more intense and personal. For this love is real love—love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom God has given us.

At this point, Paul realises afresh just how undeserving we are to receive the love of God. Indeed, God's love for us is not based on what we deserve (for we deserve only condemnation). Rather, it is based on what God, in his free grace and mercy, is pleased to give us—even while in our sinful and helpless condition.

Thus, in verse 6, the apostle Paul writes:

#### **Romans 5:6**

From before the creation of the world and of mankind, God had anticipated man's fall. Even from the eternal ages, God had planned the scheme of redemption, and everything that it entailed. Then, at exactly the right and appointed time, God sent his Son—our Redeemer—into the world. (Gal. 4:4-5; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20)

Because of our fall and sinful condition, we were utterly incapable (spiritually) of doing anything to secure our own salvation. Nor, in our fallen and sinful state, could we achieve anything that would merit God's favour or approval. Everything we tried to do or to achieve was contaminated or morally polluted by our inherently sinful nature—and was therefore unacceptable to a holy, just and righteous God. Thus, when Christ came into the world, he came to those who were spiritually powerless and helplessly lost because of their sin. (Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13-14)

We should, note, however, that it was indeed for sinners that Christ *came*—not for the righteous. We should note, too, that it was for sinners that Christ *died*—not for the righteous.

## Expository Notes

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The apostle Paul has already made plain in this epistle that no one is righteous—not even one. Everyone is unrighteous in God’s sight, and everyone deserves to die. (Rom. 3:10-20) Yet, in his abundant mercy, God sent his own Son into the world to die on the sinner’s behalf. Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for those who deserved to perish. Such was the love of God for sinners. Such was God’s love for us.

In verse 7, the apostle continues:

### Romans 5:7

Some commentators see a distinction between a ‘righteous’ man and a ‘good’ man. They believe that a ‘righteous’ man is one who is morally upright and who observes the legal and moral precepts of God’s law and of the civil law, to the best of his ability. This kind of individual may, however, appear rather distant from, and superior to, other individuals.

A ‘good’ man, however, endeavours not only to observe God’s law and the civil law to the best of his ability; he also endeavours to benefit his fellow men and women through practical love, kindness or generosity.

Thus, what Paul appears to be saying, is that one will rarely die for a merely righteous person. However, if that person also happens to be truly good by showing love, kindness and compassion toward his neighbour, then perhaps someone might be prepared to lay down his life for him.

In marked contrast to this, however, are the words of verse 8:

### Romans 5:8

Was it for truly good people that Christ died? Not at all! Was it for morally upright people that Christ died? Not at all! For whom, then, did Christ die? He died for the unrighteous. He died for the ungodly. He died for sinners. Moreover, he died for us *while we were yet in our sins*.

Christ died for those who—instead of deserving his love, mercy and grace—deserved only God’s just condemnation and eternal punishment. Thus, God demonstrated his love toward sinners. He gave his one and only Son to endure the punishment of their sins, and to make atonement for sinners by the shedding of his precious blood. Christ the truly good, righteous and just, died for us—the worst of sinners and the most unrighteous. (Cf. 1 Tim. 1:15-17)

As the apostle John says in his first epistle:

*10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for<sup>[3]</sup> our sins. (1 John 4:10 NIV)*

The same apostle continues:

*11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11 NIV)*

If God so loved us while still in our sins, should we not love others whom sin still enslaves? We must not judge those who sin—for, one day, God will judge us all.

The apostle Paul continues in verse 9, by exclaiming:

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<sup>3</sup> Or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away... [NIV footnote to 1 John 4:10]

**Romans 5:9**

Now, because of Christ's substitutionary and atoning death on our behalf, we have been justified or declared righteous in God's sight. By the blood shed on the cross for our sins, God's enmity against us was turned away or propitiated. This propitiation, or appeasement through satisfaction to God's justice, was effected by the atoning sacrifice Christ made for our sins and iniquities. (Rom. 3:23-26)

God acted to redeem us by giving his own Son to die on the cross. Christ bore on himself the wrath and curse of God due to us. By Christ's sacrifice of atonement, God has justified us and reconciled us to himself.

Now, however, that Christ has risen and lives again in glory, what will he not do for those he has died for? If his substitutionary and atoning death has secured our justification and reconciliation, how much more will the risen and living Christ keep us eternally safe and secure? Never again can we be condemned! (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1)

Thus, in verse 10, the apostle continues:

**Romans 5:10**

This confirms what has just been said on verse 9 above. Because of our sin and sinful ways, we were God's enemies—and God was at enmity with us. We were, therefore, abiding under the just wrath and condemnation of God. (John 3:36) However, by the death of his Son, God reconciled us to himself—even although we were still his enemies.

God placed within us a new and right spirit. He regenerated our souls by his Holy Spirit, and called us to himself—granting to us the gifts of repentance and faith. No longer were we God's enemies. God had made us his friends; and, more importantly, his children and heirs—co-heirs with his own Son. (Col. 1:20-23)

Having done all this through the death of his Son and his subsequent resurrection, what will he not now do for us since his Son has been exalted to the right hand of his Father? Full salvation—now, and in the future, is most assuredly ours. For Christ who died to redeem us at infinite cost, now lives to intercede for us and to keep us eternally secure unto the last day. (Heb. 7:24-25)

Thus, in verse 11, Paul writes:

**Romans 5:11**

The realisation and wonder of God's boundless love toward us should fill our hearts and souls with joy and gratitude.

Why should the holy, just and pure God of all creation so love the most sinful and impure of his creatures? We cannot answer this—but we know that it is true. God proved it true when he yielded up his own Son to the agonies of the cross in order to make atonement for our sins, and to reconcile us to himself. Thus we rejoice, and will continue to rejoice through him who loved us and gave himself for us.

This verse also tells us, however, that we received reconciliation from God; i.e. God granted it to us as a gift. We did not in any way earn God's favour in order to be reconciled. Nor did we contribute toward our reconciliation in any way whatsoever. God himself effected our reconciliation by setting forth his own Son as a sacrifice of atonement on our behalf. We, therefore, are completely indebted to God and to his grace for providing that sacrifice, and for bringing us to himself in repentance and faith. (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

## Death Through Adam; Life Through Christ

### ***Romans 5:12-21***

At this point, the apostle Paul turns his attention to the manner in which sin found an entry into the world. The apostle begins to speak of this subject in verse 12. However, before concluding his remarks on this topic, Paul digresses to deal with the relation of sin to the law. In verse 12, then, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 5:12**

As can be seen, Paul leaves this sentence unfinished. Indeed, the apostle does not resume and conclude the subject of this sentence until verses 18 and 19. There, it is evident that—just as sin and death entered the world by one man (Adam), so also righteousness and life came into the world by one man (Jesus Christ). However, we will deal with this in its proper place.

Considering verse 12, Paul asserts that sin entered the world through one man. Clearly, this refers to Adam (v.14). Adam was the root of the entire human race. Whatever Adam did affected the entire human race. Thus, when Adam disobeyed and sinned against God's express command, he fell from the state of grace and righteousness in which God had created him. (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6,17-19)

Adam incurred the threatened and just punishment of his sin; namely, death—immediate spiritual death. Among other things, spiritual death included alienation from the presence and favour of God and the withdrawal of God's gracious influences on his soul. At a later stage, spiritual death was followed by physical death. Like spiritual death, physical or biological death is part of God's punishment for sin. Had Adam not sinned, it is certain that his physical body would have been changed to suit it for immortal life—without passing through the processes of ageing, decay and death.

A third element of the death penalty for sin is eternal death. Had Adam remained unrepentant and unforgiven to the end of his life, physical death would have been followed by eternal death. Eternal death is expressed in terms of final and everlasting separation from God and from all hope of happiness in the place of eternal torments of body and soul. (Rom. 6:23)

Adam's fallen sinful nature, together with spiritual, physical and eternal death, is now common to all mankind. This is because the entire human race is the direct descendants of Adam and Eve. Again, Adam was the head and representative of the entire human race. Thus, when Adam sinned, he involved the entire human race in his apostasy, sin and guilt. To this end, the apostle Paul adds at the end of verse 12,

*"...because all sinned."*

In the sense that Adam represented all mankind, all mankind is said to have sinned in him, and therefore all fell in him. This further illustrates what the Word of God, and what everyday observation and experience teaches us: namely, that all mankind possesses a fallen, sinful nature. From this sinful nature proceed all manner of sinful acts, attitudes and dispositions. From this fallen nature, all mankind indulges in sinful thoughts, or engages in sinful speech. (Matt. 15:19)

This is the effect of Adam's fall from original righteousness, and of his subsequent spiritual death and alienation from God. Only by the sovereign grace and mercy of God can fallen sinful men and women be redeemed and reconciled to God. This, however, is the very essence of the gospel, and the theme of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Christ died for our sins, and was raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:25)

At this point, Paul digresses to speak of the presence of sin in the world before God gave his laws and commands to expose and condemn sin. It is an acknowledged fact that the law of commandments did not exist between the time of Adam and the time of Moses some hundreds of years later. Even so, this does not mean that sin was not present in the world, or that it was not culpable and worthy of death. The very fact that—from Adam to Moses—men and women died because of sin, proves that sin was present and that it incurred the death penalty. Moreover, in the case of those who remained impenitent to the end, sin brought eternal death.

Therefore, in verse 13, Paul writes:

**Romans 5:13**

Sin entered the world through the transgression of Adam and Eve. Because of the disobedience of our first parents, all mankind became sinners. From the time of Adam onward, mankind became increasingly wicked and depraved. Thus, eventually, when the earth became filled with violence, corruption and wickedness, God intervened in judgment. On this occasion, the LORD sent a catastrophic flood upon the world of mankind. This flood destroyed every air-breathing creature, including mankind itself. Only Noah and seven other people escaped God's judgment, together with the animals that God brought into the ark. (Gen. 6:5,11-14,17)

This demonstrates that sin was present and active in the world before God gave his law of commandments to Moses. It also demonstrates that God does not overlook sin in the absence of his express laws and commandments. On the contrary, the LORD punished those sinners who lived between the time of Adam and the time of Moses.

These sinners, however, did not live in complete ignorance of God's ways, nor were they unaware of their sins or iniquities. God had created them in his image. They had knowledge of right and wrong engraved on their hearts. God had endowed each of them with a conscience capable of accusing them of wrongdoing and of acquitting them when they did right—at least until hardened by their persistent sins. (Rom. 2:15) When they sinned, therefore, they sinned wilfully and deliberately—acting against their own consciences, against the revelation of God in nature, and against better knowledge. This is why sin and death continued to hold sway over mankind from the time of Adam to the time of Moses. (Rom. 1:18-32)

Having said this, however, we must acknowledge that—in the absence of God's explicit laws and commands—these sinners would not be judged by the standards of that holy and righteous law. Rather, God would judge them according to the law (or light) they had; i.e. the law or principle of right or wrong written on their hearts or as God's requirements had been imparted to them from Adam. (Rom. 2:12-16) Even so, sin and death reigned supreme over all mankind.

Thus, in verse 14, Paul writes:

**Romans 5:14**

All mankind stood condemned justly for Adam's sin, since Adam represented the entire human race. When he fell and incurred sin's penalty, the entire human race fell in him and incurred the same penalty.

Again, all mankind possesses a sinful human nature conveyed to them from Adam as a result of his fall. Because of this fallen nature, their hearts or minds are biased or inclined toward evil continually. (Gen. 6:5; Titus 3:3) From this sinful nature, all their evil thoughts, deeds and dispositions proceed. For this reason, too, every one of us stands condemned justly before the almighty, holy and righteous God.

It is true that Adam disobeyed an express command given to him by the LORD (*'...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...'* Gen. 2:16-17). It is also true that all those people living between the time of Adam and the time of Moses had not sinned by breaking a similar express command from God. Nevertheless, they remained guilty and under just condemnation for Adam's sin (which involved them representatively), for their inherently sinful nature, and for their own personal sins.

At the end of verse 14, the apostle Paul adds that Adam was a pattern or type of the one to come: i.e., Christ. All who are in Adam—i.e., all mankind—have Adam's sin imputed or reckoned to them. From Adam, too, all those who are in him participate in his guilt (i.e. legal liability) and condemnation. By contrast, however, all who are in Christ—i.e., all the redeemed children of God—have Christ's righteousness imputed or reckoned to them. From Christ, too, all those who are in him participate in justification and life.

Adam is a pattern or type of Christ in that, just as all who are united to Adam are pronounced sinners (*ipso facto*), so also all who are united to Christ are pronounced righteous (by God's sovereign grace). The pattern or type (rather, antitype) is one of contrast.

At this point, Paul digresses further to highlight the marked distinction between Adam's sin and God's grace. Thus, in verse 15, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 5:15**

There is no real parallel or point of resemblance between the sin of Adam and its effects, and the gift of God and its effects. They stand markedly opposed to each other, and therefore form contrasting principles. However, in addition, the measure of God's grace far exceeds the measure of Adam's sin. Thus, Paul begins by saying,

*15a "But the gift is not like the trespass..." (NIV)*

The apostle continues by saying that the many died by the trespass of the one man. The 'many' here is equivalent to the 'all' (men) of verse 12, and is used interchangeably with 'all' in this passage. Thus, Paul is saying that—because of Adam's transgression—death came upon all mankind (v.12).

Adam's sin, therefore, brought the whole human race into a state of sin, guilt, misery, ruin and condemnation. All humanity stood guilty and condemned for the sin committed by Adam. However, they also stood guilty and condemned for their own sinful natures, and for every individual sin proceeding from that nature. Thus, God's condemnation of the entire human race is just and righteous, and is perfectly in accordance with his holy law.

Having said this, however, the Bible makes it abundantly plain that the God of righteousness, holiness and truth, is also the God of love, mercy and compassion. Although he could have condemned mankind justly to perish eternally, God had compassion on them—even while still in their sinful condition (vv.6,8). Thus, out of his own sovereign will and pleasure, and according to his own free and unmerited grace, God sent his own Son to die instead of guilty sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ bore in his own person the punishment due to them.

This is the gift of God that far exceeds the sin of Adam. This is an expression of God's grace toward sinful men, women and young people. This proves God's everlasting love for sinners in that he yielded up his own Son to the cross for them. This proves—as nothing else can—that the love of God, and the grace of God, overflows to the many. God's grace encompasses all those who receive his forgiveness, and whom he reconciles to himself through repentance and faith in his Son. All those who are in Christ experience this immeasurable blessing. (John 3:16-18; 1 John 5:11-13)



**Romans 5:16**

God's gift does not, in any respect, compare with the consequences of Adam's sin. The gift of God is the gift of righteousness; and he grants this gift to us through faith in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 3:21-22)

Because of his sin, Adam incurred the judgment of God not only on himself, but also on the whole human race whom he represented as their head. Thus, the consequence of Adam's sin was condemnation and death for all who are in Adam (i.e. all mankind). This, however, is in complete contrast to the effects of God's gift. Because of Christ's righteousness, he was able to secure justification and life for all who are in him (i.e. for all his redeemed people) (v.18).

Justification includes legal acquittal from all charges, or the cancelling of all penalties for sin—including the penalties of spiritual and eternal death. It also includes the declaration that the justified individual is considered righteous in God's sight. This is because God has imputed (or reckoned) the righteousness of his Son—the perfect Substitute for sinners—to the believing sinner's account.

Again, because of Adam's *one* sin, judgment came upon all mankind—because all sinned (v.12). In contradistinction to this, however, because of Christ's perfect righteousness, atonement was made—not for one sin—but for *many*. Christ's substitutionary and atoning sacrifice secured the forgiveness and remission of every sin ever committed by all those for whom he died. Thus, once again, the resplendent grace of God is seen to immeasurably outweigh the results of Adam's sin. (Isa. 1:18; 43:25; Acts 13:38-39)

In verse 17, Paul continues:

**Romans 5:17**

Through the trespass of the one man, Adam, death reigns over all mankind. However, through the righteousness of the one man Jesus Christ, life abundant and eternal reigns over all those who are his. The redeemed of the Lord have received the free gift of God's grace—the gift of righteousness. This is the righteousness that comes from God above. (Rom. 3:21-24; Phil. 3:9) Out of God's abundant provision of grace, the believer continues to reign in righteousness of life, and to experience peace with God. Thus, the gift of grace and righteousness superabundantly exceeds man's fallen and sinful condition. (1 Tim. 1:14-16)

All those connected to Adam (i.e., all humanity) will die and perish eternally. The only exception to this rule is the countless multitudes whom God redeems through repentance and faith in Christ. All those connected to Christ by redemption will be saved from condemnation, and will live eternally. (1 Cor. 15:22)

Those who are Christ's by redemption and regeneration can never die. Although their present mortal bodies will die, these same bodies will be raised from death. Then, they will be changed and clothed with incorruption and immortality. At this point, they will live and reign with Christ in his everlasting glory. (2 Tim. 2:12)

We come now to verse 18. Verse 18 continues and completes what Paul began to say in verse 12 about the entry of sin into the world, and about its ruinous effects on all mankind. In verse 18 through, however, the apostle also summarises what he has just said in the intervening passages (vv. 13-17) about Adam's sin and about God's gift of righteousness. Thus, Paul writes:

### Romans 5:18

When the LORD God had created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, he gave him freedom to eat from any tree of the garden except one. Concerning this one tree, God had expressly declared to Adam,

*“but you must not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” (Gen. 2:17 NIV)*

Adam’s sin involved wilful disobedience to God’s express command. Thus, the result of this one man’s act of transgression was condemnation and death for all mankind. By his wilful disobedience to God’s command, Adam had brought upon himself the judicial sentence of condemnation and death. <sup>[4]</sup>

This same judicial sentence of condemnation and death passed upon all mankind—for Adam represented the entire human race. They had not been guilty of actually committing Adam’s sin. Nevertheless, Adam’s fall from grace and righteousness involved all mankind in the same fallen state and condition. For them, too, the punishment of spiritual death and physical death would be followed ultimately by eternal death. This could only be avoided if atonement were made for their sin; and, in their lifetime, they personally received the benefits of that atoning sacrifice through repentance toward, and faith in, God.

Yet, how is this atoning sacrifice provided for fallen and sinful mankind? By the sovereign grace of God. God provided the atoning sacrifice to take away sins. Under the OT economy, an unblemished lamb or other animal sacrifice covered over the sins of the people. These animal sacrifices typified the Lamb of God whom God would one day send into the world. (John 1:29) Jesus was the Lamb of God. When he died, his blood made a perfect and final sacrifice that took away sin once-for-all. (Heb. 7:27; 9:12,26; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18) This substitutionary and atoning sacrifice avails for everyone among mankind who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and who receives him as his or her own personal Saviour and Lord. (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10)

In the second part of verse 18, Paul mentions that, because of one act of righteousness, justification that brings life came to all men. This, of course, means all men who are in Christ; i.e. everyone who believes on him, and who receives him as their own personal Saviour and Lord.

Christ’s entire life was (and is) a life of perfect righteousness. The work he performed in obedience to his Father and on behalf of sinners was a work of unending righteousness. The Lord Jesus Christ made full satisfaction, and completed his earthly work, when he laid down his life voluntarily at the cross to atone for sin. At the cross, and subsequently, by his resurrection on the third day, the Lord Jesus secured eternally the sinner’s justification. (Rom. 4:25)

By means of Christ’s death and resurrection, God forgives and reconciles every repentant and believing sinner to himself and to his everlasting love. Thus, Christ’s one (continuing)

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<sup>4</sup> Here, as in many other places in God’s Word, ‘death’ means: (1) spiritual death (death of the soul), including alienation from God and enmity toward God; (2) physical death and the dissolution of the body; (3) eternal death consisting of final separation from God in hell or the lake of fire; a place of endless conscious suffering of the specially adapted body and soul.

[Gordon Lyons]

act of righteousness brings life, full and eternal, to all those who belong to him and in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells.

Paul now summarises and contrasts the disobedience of Adam with the obedience of Christ. Thus, in verse 19, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 5:19**

As elsewhere in this passage and in other parts of God's Word, the word 'many' is used interchangeably with the word 'all'. When this verse speaks of 'the many' being made sinners, it is referring to all those who are connected with Adam; i.e. all mankind. Again, when the verse speaks of 'the many' being made righteous, it is referring to all those who are connected with Christ; i.e. all truly regenerated believers.

Paul declares that, through Adam's disobedience, the many were made sinners. To be 'made' sinners does not mean that Adam's personal disobedience and sin somehow changed all his descendants into sinners (except insofar as they inherited Adam's sinful nature). Their becoming sinners was the result of Adam's fall, and of the corruption of his nature. To be 'made' sinners means that, in God's sight, fallen mankind was now formally pronounced and regarded as sinners.

In the second part of the verse, Paul declares that, through Christ's obedience, the many will be 'made' righteous. Again, to be made righteous does not mean that Christ's perfect righteousness is somehow actually conveyed or infused into the minds and souls of believing sinners. Rather, to be made righteous means that God now formally pronounces and regards believing sinners as though they were righteous.

The following verse from 2 Corinthians chapter 5 illustrates this truth by example:

*21 God made him who had no sin to be sin<sup>[5]</sup> for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV)*

Clearly, when it says that God made him who had no sin to be sin, it cannot possibly mean that God made Christ an actual sinner. Then, he could not have died as a perfect and sinless sacrifice. Rather, the verse means that God pronounced and regarded his Son as though he were a sinner (although not actually so). The Lord Jesus was regarded as such so that he could bear the penalty of sin, including the wrath of God, on behalf of sinners. Obviously, then—in this context—to be 'made' a sinner or to be 'made' righteous means to be pronounced and regarded as such.

God can pronounce and regard believing sinners as though they were truly righteous. He does this with complete justice, because he imputes or credits the righteousness of Christ to every born-again believer, and only because the demands of God's just and holy law have been satisfied. As a consequence of Christ's atoning sacrifice and triumphant resurrection, God sees every believer clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness.

These believers, however, do not actually possess that righteousness inwardly. Inwardly, they are still sinners—albeit, redeemed and forgiven sinners. The redeemed believer's own personal character and conduct will not become actually and completely righteous until the Holy Spirit finishes the life-long work of sanctification within their souls. Then, when the Lord calls them into his presence and finally glorifies them, they will be presented faultless and blameless before his majestic and holy throne with great rejoicing.

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<sup>5</sup> Or *be a sin offering*... [NIV footnote to 2 Cor. 5:21]

## Expository Notes

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In the concluding two verses of this chapter, the apostle Paul mentions briefly one purpose of the law. The apostle also contrasts the effects of the law with the effects of God's grace.

Thus, in verse 20, Paul writes:

### **Romans 5:20**

In the first part of this verse, Paul says that the law was added so that the trespass might increase.

Hundreds of years after the fall of Adam, God gave his law of commands and ordinances to Moses. Until this time, fallen mankind had the principles of right and wrong written on their hearts or consciences, and were instructed verbally of God's ways and requirements from the time of Adam to that of Moses. Thus, when they sinned, they sinned against the knowledge of God's requirements. Consequently, their consciences convicted them of wrongdoing and condemned their sinful thoughts, words or actions. (Rom. 2:14-15)

However, when God delivered his express Table of Commands to Moses, this law of commands specifically identified individual sins and classes of sin. This had the effect of highlighting sin and making mankind much more aware of their sinfulness. (Rom. 3:20) In this sense, therefore, the law was added *so that the trespass might increase*. Man's sin was now exposed for what it really was. The holy and righteous law of God condemned mankind's sin utterly, and declared sinful men and women worthy of punishment and death. (Rom. 7:7)

Even so, as the second part of verse 20 reveals, where sin increased, grace increased all the more. The more God's law highlighted, exposed and condemned sin, the more God's grace was highlighted and revealed in all its undeserved love, mercy and compassion toward the sinner: For the same God who justly condemned sin in the sinner, also justly provided a means of atonement. This atonement secures the sinner's forgiveness and reconciles the sinner to God. Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

### **Romans 5:21**

Looking at verse 21, Paul declares that sin reigned in death: That is, sin ruled supreme over all of fallen mankind. Sin, however, brought its due reward; and the reward or wages of sin is death. Thus all who remain impenitent to the end, perish eternally as a consequence of their unforgiven sins (v.14).

In contrast to this, however, God's grace reigns in righteousness: That is, grace rules supreme in the lives of all those who belong to Christ through repentance toward God, and faith in his atoning sacrifice. This grace brings its own reward. This reward, however, comes to repentant and believing sinners in the form of a gift: the gift of righteousness and of eternal life. This gift is freely bestowed upon the redeemed children of God by his unmerited grace, and is received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (v.15).

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## Romans Chapter 6

### Not under Law, But under Grace

#### **Romans 6:1-14**

Up to this point, the apostle Paul has been talking principally about that righteousness which comes to believing sinners through justification. God imputes this righteousness to sinners by his grace. Justification is a once-for-all act whereby God pronounces a repentant and believing sinner to be righteous in his sight. This is because God—in his grace—imputes or credits Christ's righteousness to the believing sinner's account. It is not because the sinner has actually become, or been made, inwardly righteous or holy. This once-for-all act of justification takes place at regeneration and conversion. Justification is a righteous *status* or *standing*. In and of itself, however, justification does not produce an inwardly righteous *state*: i.e., it does not make a person actually and inwardly holy.

From chapter 6 of Romans onward, the apostle Paul begins to concentrate on another element of salvation that is inseparable from justification. Nevertheless, this element is distinct from justification in the way that it operates in the believer's life. This is the work of sanctification. Unlike the once-for-all *act* of justification, sanctification is a life-long *process*. It is carried out in the life of each and every true believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

During this ongoing and life-long process, the Holy Spirit continues to mould the believer's character and conduct to conform ever more closely to the likeness of Christ. (2 Cor. 3:18) This process, however, is not completed until the end of the believer's life (or until the Lord appears in glory). Only then does the believer become finally and completely righteous or free from sin and wholly obedient to God. During this life, however, the believer must endure many trials and temptations. Nevertheless, these are all part of the strengthening and purifying process of sanctification in the believer's life, and God's all-sufficient grace and mercy to help in time of need always attend them. (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 12:8-10; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-16)

Returning for a moment, however, to Paul's discussion of justification: Even in Paul's day, there were people who asserted that the teaching of justification by faith encouraged people to continue practising their sinful way of life (antinomianism). These people argued that—if God in his grace could justify even the most unrighteous sinner—then that same grace could continue to justify and forgive any professing believer who continued to practice a sinful way of life. After all, they contended, the believer's continued sins were only serving to magnify God's grace all the more. (Rom. 3:5-8)

Such an argument grossly distorts the teaching of God's Word. It also fails completely to understand the true nature of conversion. Again, it fails manifestly to understand or appreciate the inseparable relationship between regeneration, justification and sanctification. Conversion involves true repentance toward God, and genuine saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Where these are present, it is because regeneration is also present. Moreover, where regeneration or the new birth is present, then justification must of necessity attend, and sanctification must of necessity follow. This is as inevitable in the truly regenerated believer's life as day follows night. However, without any one of these essential elements of salvation, there can have been no true work of conversion and thus no real work of God's grace.

Thus, to address and refute such pernicious arguments, the apostle begins chapter 6 by writing:

### Romans 6:1

God's grace brings justification and eternal life to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. By grace, God imputes to every regenerated believer the free gift of righteousness. This righteousness comes from God, and therefore is fully acceptable to God. Indeed, it is the righteousness of his own Son that God imputes or credits to the believing sinner's account. (Rom. 3:21-24)

However, if God in his grace freely credits righteousness to everyone who believes, is it not possible for the professing believer to go on sinning, and thus magnify God's grace?

This kind of argument is, of course, both absurd and preposterous. It comes very close to despising the grace of God, and it threatens to trample under foot the precious blood by which the believer is redeemed, justified and sanctified. Such a thought should be utterly unthinkable. (Cf. Heb. 10:29; Jude 4) Thus, in response to this almost blasphemous question, the apostle vehemently responds in verse 2:

### Romans 6:2

Absolutely not!—exclaims the apostle. This is not where God's grace, or the teaching about justification by faith, leads us. On the contrary, when we believed that Christ died for our sins, we believed that our sins were nailed to the cross with him. We believed that he bore the punishment for our sins in his own body on the tree. (Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:24)

We have died *to* sin, just as Christ has died *for* sin. How, then, can we still practice those things for which Christ suffered God's wrath, and died? We practised those things while our lives were still united with Adam and the fallen nature. Now, however, our lives are united with Christ, and his Spirit has given us a new nature. Now, we belong to the holy Son of God, and he is our Redeemer and Lord. We, therefore, must live a life that is consistent with our union with Christ Jesus. (Col. 3:3-10; 1 Pet. 2:16; 1 John 3:9)

Paul reinforces these thoughts in verse 3, where he writes:

### Romans 6:3

Everyone whom the Spirit of God regenerates, and who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, has been baptised into his death. The believer has been united with Christ in his death: That is, he has died to sin's controlling influence over his life.

The waters of baptism typify this baptism into Christ's death. The water itself, however, does not in any way effect a person's regeneration, nor does it unite a person to Christ. The water of baptism is merely typical. Granted, it is a God-ordained and very important sign and seal. For this reason, believers should not neglect the ordinance of baptism. However, important as it is, water baptism is not an essential element of salvation. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:21)

The baptism of which Paul is speaking here, however, appears to be that mystical union with Christ, into which every believer enters at his or her spiritual regeneration. Then, as the regenerated soul responds in faith to the call and message of the gospel, and appropriates the crucified, buried and resurrected Christ as his Saviour, he is baptised (mystically or spiritually) into the body of Christ.

This is another way of saying that the believer's old sinful manner of life has been reckoned dead with Christ. It says further that the old life has been buried with him, and that the believer now considers himself as having been raised with Christ to live a new life. This new life is characterised by the desire to please and honour God, and to progress in



the way of holiness. (Gal. 3:27) This is exactly the meaning Paul brings out in the next verse:

#### **Romans 6:4**

This confirms what has just been said above. Baptism in water typifies the believer's death, burial and resurrection with Christ. It typifies—but it does not effect—the regenerating and cleansing power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. The believer's actual spiritual union with Christ (or baptism into his death) is not effected by outward signs or observances, but by faith in Christ and in his perfect work on the cross on the sinner's behalf. The believer becomes united to Christ through faith. By his almighty power, God raised Jesus from the dead. We too, who believe on Jesus, have been raised by that same almighty power from spiritual death.

Spiritual death includes our unwillingness and inability to respond to those things that honour and glorify God. Spiritual death also includes our unbelieving attitude toward God and his Son. Again, it includes our desire to pursue a sinful and independent way of life. Finally, spiritual death includes our resulting alienation from, and enmity with, God.

Now, however, by the power and glory of the Holy Spirit, God has called us to faith in Christ, and has raised us (spiritually) from death to life. The life we now live, we live unto God. For Jesus, the holy, spotless Lamb of God shed his lifeblood to ransom us to God, and to make us a holy people in his sight. (Rom. 8:11-14; 1 Pet. 2:9)

In verse 5 the apostle Paul continues:

#### **Romans 6:5**

It is certain that—as believers—we have been identified and united with Christ in his death. Thus, we should reckon our old sinful nature as having been crucified and buried with Christ. We ought to consider ourselves as dead to the desires of the old nature (v.11).

Christ, however, did not remain crucified or buried. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus arose from the dead on the third day. Christ arose to effect our justification and reconciliation with God, and to free us from our sins. Thus, just as Christ rose again *physically* to a new life, so the believer rises again *spiritually* to a new life in Christ. Therefore, we are not only united with him in his death; we are also united with him in his resurrection.

We rise, however, not only to a new spiritual life in Christ, but also to eternal life in him. Thus, our translation from death to life is in reality from spiritual (and, ultimately, physical and eternal) death to spiritual and eternal life. This includes both the renewal of the soul, and the resurrection (or translation) and renewal of the body. (John 5:24-29; Eph. 2:5-6)

Some commentators believe that the union with Christ in his resurrection spoken of above is yet in the future. This is partly because Paul uses the future tense in this sentence ('*we will...be united...*'). The context, however, requires us to understand this union with Christ in his resurrection as beginning at the time of the believer's regeneration and justification. Having said this, however, it is granted that this union with Christ in his resurrection develops in the life of each believer through the ongoing process of sanctification.

Thus, we not only die with Christ (in respect of our old nature), but we also rise with him (in respect of our new nature). The apostle amplifies this in verses 6 and 7 where he writes:

### Romans 6:6-7

Our old self—our old sinful nature—was put to death with Christ on the tree. He died for our sins. However, he also died to destroy the power of sin over our lives, and the dominating influence of the sinful nature on our minds. (Gal. 2:20)

In and of itself, the body is not sinful. However, it can be—and often is—used for sinful purposes. Therefore, when Paul speaks of the body of sin as being done away with, he is speaking of putting to death all abuses and misuses of the body. Only then can the Holy Spirit fully cleanse and sanctify our body, so that it becomes his most holy dwelling place—or temple.

As long as we lived according to our old sinful manner of life, sin was our master and we were its slaves. However, when we were united with Christ in his death, we were set free from our slavery to the sinful nature. This is because anyone who has died can no longer respond to external or internal influences. Thus, when we reckon our old nature to be dead and buried with Christ, we cannot respond to evil desires. (Gal. 5:24; 1 Pet. 4:1-2)

This, however, is why it is essential to realise that we are also united with Christ in his resurrection. Unless we live our new lives by the grace of God and by the power of his Holy Spirit, we will not continue to see our old nature as dead and buried. Thus, we must walk with the Lord, and make no provision for our old way of life. (Rom. 8:5-14; 13:14)

To this end, Paul writes in verse 8:

### Romans 6:8

When we became believers, our old self was united with Christ in his death. Christ, however, arose from the dead. Thus, we have also been united with him in his resurrection.

When, Christ arose, he arose to live again unto God in the power of an endless life. We, too, who have been raised with Christ, have been raised to live with him in the power of an endless life (or eternal life). In Christ's case, this power lies within himself. In our case, we derive his power in our lives through the effective working of his Holy Spirit within us. So long as we live unto him, and keep our eyes and minds on the Lord Jesus, he imparts to us his strength to uphold us and to deliver us. We, therefore, live by faith in the Son of God. We believe that, as surely he lives, we also will live. (Col. 3:2-4; Heb. 12:2-3)

In verse 9, the apostle Paul writes:

### Romans 6:9

Strictly speaking, death never at any time exercised mastery over the Lord Jesus, and Paul is not suggesting otherwise. As the eternal Son of God, he cannot die or cease to exist. And, since the Lord Jesus is totally perfect and sinless, death has no claim over him. Indeed, Jesus Christ is Lord of all—including death itself.

When, therefore, the apostle Paul says that death no longer has mastery over Christ, he is speaking of what Christ volunteered to do on behalf of sinners, and in obedience to his Father. Although death had no claim on Christ, the Lord Jesus voluntarily laid down his life as an atoning and substitutionary sacrifice for sin and for sinners. Only in this sense can it be said that death had mastery over Christ.

However, the same Lord Jesus who had authority from his Father to lay down his life, had authority also to take it again. Thus, when he had made a satisfactory atonement for our sins, the Lord Jesus arose from death. (John 10:17-18) By rising from death on the third day, the Lord Jesus Christ proved that he was conqueror over sin, Satan and the grave, and also over death itself. Death was powerless to hold him in its grasp.

Now that the Lord has paid the full penalty for our sins, there will never be any necessity for him to lay down his life again. God has exalted his Son to his own right hand in glory. There he will remain—interceding for his people—until the day he comes to gather his loved ones home. Then, they will live and reign with him for ever and ever. (Heb. 7:25)

Thus, in verse 10, the apostle writes:

**Romans 6:10**

When Christ died on Calvary's tree, he died for our sins once-for-all. There will never be a need at any time in the future for the Lord Jesus to repeat that sacrifice of atonement for the sins of his people. The fact that God raised his Son from the dead for our justification proved that the Lord Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary was fully sufficient to atone for the sins of all generations of God's redeemed people. It proved also that Jesus' atoning sacrifice would remain effective for all time, and that it was wholly acceptable to God. The letter to the Hebrews makes this abundantly clear. (Heb. 10:10-14,18) Christ, therefore, will never die again. Now, he has resumed his place in the presence of his Father. There, he continues to live his life wholly unto God, and for the benefit and blessing of all his blood-bought people.

However, just as Christ lives his life wholly unto God, so also ought the believer to do the same. Thus, in verse 11, Paul writes:

**Romans 6:11**

By his death and resurrection, Christ destroyed the ruling power of sin over our lives. By our union with him in his death and burial, our old sinful nature has been mortified or put to death. By our union with Christ in his resurrection and endless life, we have been raised to newness of life and to victory over sin.

This does not mean that the potential to sin is no longer present within us. Christ destroyed the ruling power of the old sinful nature. But that nature still exists within us, and it will continue to exist until God finally sanctifies and glorifies us. Nevertheless, we are to count ourselves as dead to sin; or totally unresponsive to the demands, cravings and desires of our old nature. We are to make no provision for the temptations of our sinful nature. Rather, we are to reckon that nature as crucified, dead and buried with Christ. We are to consider ourselves alive with Christ in the power of a new, God-centred, and God-glorifying life. (1 Cor. 6:20)

Of course, no one—no matter how advanced or mature in the Christian faith—can win the victory over their sinful nature by their own efforts. Even so, Christ promises us victory through our living, vital union with him. We appropriate this victory over sin and temptation by faith. This means that we must live by faith in Christ and in his almighty power—knowing that he is both able and willing to help us in our time of need. To this end, we must allow Christ to reign supreme in our hearts and lives—acknowledging and serving no other Master but him.

Thus, in verse 12, the apostle Paul writes:

**Romans 6:12**

Although subdued by the power of God's grace, and by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, the old sinful nature still exists within the believer's heart and life. By the grace of God, however, we must never again allow that old nature to exercise dominion over our lives. Nor must we allow it to enslave us to its evil desires, or to express itself through the abuse or misuse of our bodies. Our whole person—body and soul—now belongs to

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Christ. His Spirit now indwells our bodies and sanctifies us in body and soul. Thus, when we sin, we must confess our sin immediately to the Lord, seeking his forgiveness and cleansing. (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2) We must not, however, habitually practise sin, or yield to its evil passions, desires or inclinations. To do so, is to desecrate God's most holy temple (our body).

Again, to live consistently, and against better knowledge, in the deliberate practise of sin, is to show that we have not experienced regeneration, justification or the ongoing process of sanctification. (Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:15-17,19-20) This would mean, however, that no work of saving grace could have taken place in our hearts and lives. In this case, we would still be in our sins, and in a lost condition. (Cf. 2 Cor. 13:5) Thus, it is imperative that we prove the reality of our faith and repentance by walking with the Lord, and by producing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives—rather than the acts of the sinful nature. (Gal. 5:19-25)

In verse 13, Paul continues:

### **Romans 6:13**

Christ has redeemed the believer in body and soul. God's Holy Spirit now indwells each believer's body, and sanctifies it as his holy temple. Therefore, we cannot use any part of our body—or our mind—for sinful purposes. Our body is God's holy dwelling place. Thus, instead of using the parts of our bodies, or our minds, for wicked purposes, we ought to offer our whole being—body and soul—to God. This is our living sacrifice to God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

God delivered us from spiritual death; from alienation from himself, and from the way that leads to eternal death. In his grace and mercy, he brought us into the experience of new spiritual life in Christ Jesus, into full communion with himself and with his Son, and into the way that leads to eternal life. Thus, since God so loved us as to pay the price of our redemption, and since he has regenerated and adopted us as his own children, we ought to live lives that honour our Father in heaven. To this end, we must offer to him every part of our body and our soul to be used as instruments of righteousness, holiness and honour.

Paul concludes the first part of chapter 6 by writing in verse 14:

### **Romans 6:14**

Sin shall no longer exercise its dominion over you, or enslave you to its evil desires and passions. Now, the Lord has released you from slavery to sinful desires and practises. Your Deliverer and new Master is Christ. He is the one you ought now to obey—willingly, and because you love him and trust him. (Rom. 8:2)

In this verse, the apostle Paul reminds his readers and hearers that they are not under law but under grace. This does not refer exclusively to the Mosaic Law, although this Law is included. Rather, it refers to the principle of law more generally, insofar as it sets forth certain requirements to be obeyed or observed. The law as a principle, therefore, may be thought of as something that binds the conscience. According to one such principle or general law—in order to achieve righteousness—a person must observe certain stringent requirements, or attain to a specified standard of human morality and conduct.

According to the Mosaic law, anyone wishing to achieve righteousness (by his own efforts), was required to keep the law of God flawlessly, from the very beginning of his life to the very end—without failing in even one point. Those who failed in even one point of the law became guilty of breaking all of it. They also came under the curse for their transgression of the law. (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10-11)

Clearly, then, attaining righteousness by this method was an impossibility. No one in the world could keep the law in this way, or attain to God's standards of perfection. Therefore, every individual found himself justly condemned by the law for his failure to keep it, and enslaved by his sinful passions and inclinations. (Rom. 3:19-20) Thus, so long as a person remained under the law—or bound by the law's requirements and demands—he remained under the curse of the law. In addition, he was a slave to sin, and he was totally incapable of attaining to the righteous life that God required.

How, then, was righteousness to be attained? Certainly not by works of self-effort or by the law, but purely by the grace of God. God offers righteousness as a free gift to everyone who acknowledges their helpless and sinful condition, and who turns to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith in order to find mercy. (Rom. 3:21-24)

When, by the grace of God, anyone calls upon the name of the Lord, that person will be saved. God justifies the repentant and believing sinner and pronounces him righteous in his sight—through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 10:9-11,13) However, since the believer receives this righteousness as a free and unmerited gift of God's sovereign grace, the believing and justified sinner is now said to be under grace, not under law. What the law could not do—due to the sinner's helpless condition—grace did. The law could not free us from our sins or pronounce us righteous before God—but grace did.

## **Grace is Not a Licence to Sin**

### ***Romans 6:15-23***

Paul anticipated that some people might object to this form of teaching. They might contend that it leaves the door wide open to the deliberate practise of sin; since (they reasoned) a loving God will always forgive the sinner. To counter such a mistaken line of argument, the apostle asks in verse 15:

#### **Romans 6:15**

Theoretically, at least, if a person was living under grace, then he was free from the law's demands and restraints. Arguably, therefore he could do anything he pleased, since God—in his grace—would forgive him.

Is this really what follows from the doctrine of grace? Most certainly not! —As Paul takes pains to point out. To practise sin while under grace would be to despise the grace of God, and to repudiate the blood of the covenant. However, it is through his Son's pure, sacred and cleansing blood that God justifies and sanctifies the believer. (Heb. 10:29; cf. Jude 4)

A truly regenerated believer, therefore, cannot continue deliberately to practise sin. Nor can he disregard the moral and spiritual principles of God's holy, just and righteous law. Granted, the law neither saves a person nor secures him in his salvation. Salvation and eternal security depends entirely on God's grace. Yet, we must honour God by observing the very first principles of his law. These principles comprise love for God and love for our neighbour. (Mark 12:30-31; Titus 2:11-14)

Essentially, then, grace requires that we become the willing and obedient servants of the Lord—not the servants of sin. To this end, Paul writes in verse 16:

#### **Romans 6:16**

Those who consider themselves free to disregard God's law because they are under grace are thereby demonstrating that sin is still their master. God gave his law to provide guidelines and principles of obedience. Those, however, who disregard the law of love—

to God and to our neighbour—show a disregard for God himself. They fail to demonstrate a commitment to God and to the truths of his Word. Rather, by their disregard of these basic principles of love, trust and obedience, they are demonstrating a commitment to sin, and to a self-centred life instead of a God-centred life. Instead of experiencing release from sin's corrupting and enslaving power, they are still sin's slaves. This is the true position of those who practise sin while, at the same time, professing to be living under God's liberating grace and power. The end of this way, however, is death. (John 8:34; 2 Pet. 2:19; cf. Matt. 6:24)

By contrast, those who—in humility and faith—endeavour to live by God's grace, experience the end of their obedience to God and to his Word; namely, life and peace. They, too, are slaves—but they are the willing slaves of righteousness. The Lord Jesus Christ is their Master, and they rejoice that he has set them truly free (vv.13-14). Thus, in verse 17, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 6:17**

It is true that, at one time, sin held every one of us as its slaves. It is also true that, at that time, we may have thought, said or done many things of which we are now ashamed. This was the outcome of our slavery to sin and to its passions and demands. This was the way of death, or alienation from God, from his love, and from his peace in our hearts. (Titus 3:3)

Now, however, by God's grace, the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us from our bondage to sin and from the misery it produced in our hearts and lives. Through faith in him, and through obedience to God's Word, the Lord has reconciled us to the Father, and set us in his family as his own freeborn children. (Titus 3:4-7)

So long as we continue to live by faith, and walk in the light of God's Word—holding fast to its teachings—the Holy Spirit will ensure that we remain free in heart and life. When, however, we do commit sin, we can confess that sin to God. In his Word, God has given us the precious assurance that—for the sake of his own dear Son—he will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8 - 2:2)

In verse 18, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 6:18**

By his grace, the Lord has released us from our bondage to sin, and from its guilt and penalty. Sin no longer exercises its cruel dominion over us. (John 8:36)

This does not mean that the believer has become sinless. It does mean, however, that he does not serve sin, or yield himself to its evil demands. Now, the believer serves another Master, and that Master is Christ.

To serve the Lord, however, is a joy and a privilege. To become slaves of righteousness is to fulfil, in this life, the purpose for which God created us; namely, to live to his glory and to honour him by our conduct. The fruit of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit—foremost of which is love. (Isa. 26:13; Luke 1:74-75)

In verse 19, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 6:19**

Up to this point, Paul had been using figurative language to illustrate the contrast between slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness. The apostle, however, realises that not every

believer can easily grasp this kind of language. In order, therefore, to clarify matters and to expand on the principles involved, Paul uses a practical everyday example.

In the past, while still in their sins, the believer may have surrendered various parts of his body to sin. He may have fulfilled all kinds of excessive, inordinate or lustful desires. He may also have involved other people in his evil and impure practices. (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 3:5-7)

We must not imagine, however, that Paul is referring only to sins of uncleanness or immorality committed by the body itself. Other parts of the body include the mind and the tongue. Every evil inclination arises from the mind. Therefore, whatever sinful thoughts a person cherishes in his mind are just as blameworthy and polluting to the soul as the actual sinful act. (Matt. 15:18-20)

Similarly, the eyes and ears are parts of the body. If a person uses his eyes to look at impure sights, media or other material, then he too is guilty of impurity or moral uncleanness (immorality). Likewise, if a person listens deliberately to, or engages in, an impure conversation or discussions, then he too is guilty of using the parts of his body (ears and tongue) to commit sin (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16).

These were all common examples from everyday life among the Romans, and examples with which they readily understood and identified. This was the kind of slavery to which many of them had been bound before Christ had set them free. (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 4:2-4)

All this happened in the past, however, Now, Paul exhorts these believers to submit the same parts of their body to the Lord. He has redeemed that body, and the Spirit sanctifies it as his holy dwelling place. In view of this, the believer ought to practise right and godly living—by the grace and power of God's Holy Spirit. This is the only kind of living that honours God, that leads to holiness, and that produces true inward peace in the believer's life. This is the kind of living that produces the fruit of the Spirit. (V.13)

In verses 20 and 21, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 6:20-21**

Those whom sin has enslaved cannot benefit from the way of righteousness, nor produce its fruits. On the contrary, sin pays its due wages in full—and the wages of sin is death (v.23; see also Gen. 2:17; 3:17-19).

Death means much more than physical death—although physical death certainly results from Adam and Eve's (original) sin. In the Bible, death means spiritual death, or alienation from God, from his love, and from his peace in our hearts and lives. This is the peace of heart and mind that comes only through knowledge of sins forgiven. It is not therefore available to those who remain at enmity with God by their sins. (Isa. 57:20-21)

Death also includes the effects of sin on our minds or in our lives. This comprehends such things as the pain and misery that sin causes us, and often others as well. It comprehends also the unnecessary and otherwise avoidable sorrows, griefs and distresses that we bring upon ourselves because of our sinful attitudes and practices. (Jer. 4:18)

Ultimately, of course, a person's slavery to sin would lead to his eternal death. Eternal death is the just and final punishment on all impenitent and unbelieving sinners. It includes everlasting separation from God and from his love, mercy and compassion, in that place termed as 'a lake of fire.'

This, then, is the dreadful harvest that sin produces in a person's life. Every unrepentant sinner will one day reap this harvest. Far from being in any sense beneficial, sin is a curse leading inexorably to death—in every sense of that word.

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Yet, Paul acknowledges that—for these believers at Rome—these things lay in the past. They represented the attitudes, habits and practises for which they had since expressed deep shame and godly repentance. In his mercy and grace, God had completely forgiven them, and he would never again remember their transgressions. (Heb. 8:12)

In verse 22, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 6:22**

Glory be to God! Through faith in Christ, the Lord has set us free from our former slavery to sin. He has broken forever the chains that bound, and released us from the iron yoke. We are no longer sin's slaves, nor must we yield ourselves any longer to sin's evil, but enticing, demands. (Ps. 116:16-17; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:1)

Now, we are the slaves of the Lord. However, we are the Lord's slaves in the best possible sense; for, of our own free choice, we obey and follow him willingly and joyfully. We have discovered that obedience to God and to his Word brings true release, true freedom, and true peace of heart, mind and conscience. Therefore, we benefit very considerably from our willing slavery to the Lord.

In addition, and by the grace and power of God's indwelling Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, we produce in our lives the fruit of the Spirit. This is the fruit, or practical outworking and evidence, of a truly sanctified, consecrated and holy life. We have received from the Lord the gift of righteousness—together with eternal life.

Summing up these thoughts, the apostle Paul declares in verse 23:

### **Romans 6:23**

Sin pays its wages, and the wages of sin is death: spiritual, physical and eternal death. Every sinner earns these wages by the very sins he commits. Therefore, every sinner will be paid the wages of death in full. (Rom. 5:12; Gal. 6:7-8; Rev. 21:8)

In marked contrast to sin, a person cannot earn righteousness. It is not paid as a reward for good deeds or for any other kind of deeds, however commendable they may be in the sight of God or men. (Gal. 3:10-12) Righteousness is a gift. No one can earn or merit a gift—otherwise, it would cease to be a gift. God imputes righteousness to every sinner who believes on Christ, and who calls upon his name for mercy and salvation. (John 3:14-16; 1 John 5:11-13; Rom. 10:9-10,13)

The fruit of this righteousness from God above is eternal life. Eternal life comprehends not only everlasting life in heaven, but also peace with God in heart and conscience. It also comprehends the assurance of continuing grace and salvation, and all the benefits that flow from our union with Christ and from our daily walk with him. (Cf. Isa. 32:17)

God, in his Word, asserts:

*23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," (NIV)*

The contrast between these two states is immeasurable. Thanks be to God for such unbounded and undeserved mercy!



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## Romans Chapter 7

### Free From the Law!

#### **Romans 7:1-6**

In chapter 7 of Romans, the apostle Paul uses an analogy from everyday life to illustrate that a binding law is broken, or rendered ineffective, by death. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 7, the apostle asks:

#### **Romans 7:1**

In writing to the believers at Rome, Paul is addressing those who know the law; i.e. they are familiar with the teaching of the OT Scriptures. From their knowledge of the Scriptures, they are aware that God's law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. This truth, of course, is self-evident. However, the point being made by Paul is that—once a person dies—he is free in relation to the law's demands on him.

In practice, of course, it is not the person (or the law) that dies. However, the law is rendered ineffective insofar as the believing and justified sinner is concerned. Christ has fulfilled the law's demands on the believer's behalf. Therefore, the law no longer has any rightful claim over the believer. In this sense, the law is 'dead', and the believer is not under any obligations to its demands.

In verse 2, Paul illustrates this principle further:

#### **Romans 7:2**

According to the law of God relating to marriage, a wife remains bound to her husband as long as he is alive. Under normal circumstances, she cannot be released from the law of marriage except by her husband's death. (Mark 10:6-9; 1 Cor. 7:39)

In verse 3, Paul continues:

#### **Romans 7:3**

The law binds a wife to her husband as long as he lives. During this time, she is not at liberty to unite with, or marry, any other man. If she does, God's Word declares her to be an adulteress. (Exodus 20:14) An adulteress is one who has violated God's law and the marriage covenant, and who has brought herself under the just condemnation of the law. (The same, of course, is true of an adulterer.)

If, however, the woman's husband dies, she is then released from the marriage law and covenant. Now, she is perfectly free to marry another man without being considered as one who has violated God's law. On the contrary, she would be fulfilling God's law.

From verses 4 to 6, Paul applies this analogy to the believer's life, especially as it relates to law and grace. Thus, the apostle writes in verse 4:

#### **Romans 7:4**

Possibly, to avoid any misunderstanding, Paul does not say that the *law* is dead, but rather that the *believer* is dead to the law. This avoids giving the impression that God's

law is of no ethical or moral value to the believer, which manifestly is untrue. As a means of attaining righteousness or justification, however, the law is a dead letter. In this respect, it is completely ineffective and wholly unable to provide life. This does not arise from any defect in the law, which is holy, just and good. Rather, it arises from the fact that fallen and sinful mankind is totally unable to keep the law of God perfectly.

Christ died as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. By his perfect work (life, death and resurrection), the Lord Jesus fulfilled every requirement of God's law on our behalf. Therefore, as far as sin and its penalty are concerned, the law has no further claim over us. In this, and every other similar respect, we have died to (the demands of) the law. As Paul declares to the Roman believers, however, we have died to the law so that we might belong to another. Our first 'husband' (the law) has died, leaving us free to become completely committed and bound to another (the Lord Jesus Christ).

Christ died for our sins, but he also rose again for our justification. Our righteousness, then, is God's gift to us through faith in Christ. It is not, and could never have been, based on our commitment or obedience to the law. Christ has redeemed us and set us free from the law's demands—demands that we were completely unable to fulfil. The Lord has bound us to himself, that we might bear fruit for him to the glory of God. (Rom. 6:22; Col. 1:10)

The fruit that he seeks is the fruit or produce of a sanctified and holy life, united with a humble and contrite heart. These are the characteristics that honour the Lord, for they derive from the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. From his sanctifying presence, also, issue the fruits of love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23)

In verse 5, Paul continues:

### **Romans 7:5**

At one time (says Paul to the Roman believers), our sinful nature dominated our thoughts, speech and actions. Because of that sinful nature, we were inclined to do those things that God's law forbade or condemned. Often, the very fact that the law identified sin, made us the more determined to practise sin. Such is the evil and rebellious nature of our old sinful self.

God's law condemned our sin, but it also aroused our sinful inclinations. At one time or another, we used every part of our body in the service of sin. For example, we used our mind to harbour evil thoughts. We used our eyes to watch or view sinful things, and our ears to listen to sinful conversations. Again, we used our tongue to express unkind, thoughtless, untruthful or otherwise evil remarks, or for unclean or coarse expressions or conversations. Similarly, we used other parts of our body (or our mind) to bring shame and dishonour upon ourselves, and upon the name of the one who created our body. (Matt. 15:19-20; Gal. 5:19-21)

For all those offences, God's law justly condemned us. Thus, the fruit we bore resulted in death—for death is the penalty of sin. (James 2:10-11)

All this happened in the past, however, declares Paul to these Roman believers. Thus, in verse 6, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 7:6**

Now, this situation should never arise. We are no longer slaves to our sinful passions and desires. Christ has set us free. He has released us from that which bound us, and which led to misery and death. (Rom. 6:21-22) The Lord, however, has released us for a purpose; namely, that we might serve and honour him (v.4). Service to Christ, however, can-

not be compared with service or slavery to sin. The former leads to freedom and life. The latter leads to bondage and death.

Again, serving Christ does not commit us to a code of rules and regulations that we find impossible to keep. This is the way of attempting to find justification and life by keeping the law, or by observing the written code. However, fallen mankind cannot keep God's law, and therefore cannot attain to justification or life by this means. (Gal. 3:10)

On the contrary, commitment to Christ involves us in following the new way of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives life—through the living and abiding Word of God. It is the Spirit who fills our hearts with the love, peace and joy. It is the Spirit who enables us, by God's grace, to walk with the Lord in trust and obedience. Again, it is the Spirit who works in us and through us to bring forth the fruit that honours God and that glorifies his holy name. (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6)

## **The Purpose and Effects of the Law**

### ***Romans 7:7-12***

Some people might imagine that Paul is saying that the law leads to sin—a scurrilous assertion. Alternatively, they might object that the apostle is minimising the law's importance or significance.

The law has a specific purpose, as soon Paul will explain. However, it was not the purpose of God's law to provide life through obedience to its commands. This is because fallen mankind cannot keep its commands. Rather, the purpose of the law was to identify and highlight sin, to condemn sin in the sinner, and to show him his great need of forgiveness and redemption. (Rom. 3:20; 5:20-21; Gal. 3:23-24)

To explain, therefore, the law's true purpose, the apostle begins the next section by writing in verse 7:

### **Romans 7:7**

{Cf. Exodus 20:17; Deut. 5:21}

As a former Pharisee, the apostle Paul knew full well the value, purpose and intent of God's law, and he recognised the law as just, holy and good. Indeed, God's law represented the standard of perfect righteousness required by God in order to attain life. Because of his sin, however, no one could keep God's holy law. Therefore, the law that promised life to those who kept it perfectly only brought condemnation and death to those who broke it. (Rom. 3:23)

The fact, however, that the law revealed and condemned a person's sin, did not mean that the law itself was defective or an instrument of sin. The fact that a mirror reflects a person's imperfections does not mean that the mirror itself is flawed. It merely reveals the flaws or imperfections of those who look into it. Again, the better the quality of the mirror, the more clearly it reveals every imperfection. So it is with the law of God. That law is of the highest quality imaginable—for it is perfect or flawless in every detail. Those who look into God's law, or into his Word, find that law or that Word exposing their sin. (Cf. James 1:23-25)

The law, therefore, points out a person's sin. To take Paul's example above, God's law says, "*Do not covet.*" Essentially this means, 'do not desire that which belongs to someone else,' or 'do not desire things you do not really need.' (Exodus 20:17; Deut. 5:21)

It is a clearly expressed principle of God Word that covetousness is greed, and greed is idolatry. Those who covet are worshipping in their hearts someone or something other

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than the true and living God. This is idolatry. (Col. 3:5) Until, however, Paul became aware of God's law that said, "*Do not covet*," the apostle did not realise what coveting really was, nor did he appreciate its sinfulness in God's sight. God's law therefore identified coveting as sin, and condemned the person who was guilty of this sin. (1 John 2:15-17; cf. James 4:1-3)

The same applies to every other sin identified as such by the law of God. It makes it abundantly plain to the person that he is a sinner in need of redemption.

Paul now explains the effects of God's law on the sinful mind. Thus, in verse 8, the apostle writes:

### Romans 7:8

God's commandment identified and forbade sin. However, the effect of God's holy commandment on a sinful mind was to provoke that mind to disobedience and rebellion. For example, as we have seen, God's law highlighted covetousness as sin. However, by highlighting the nature of covetousness, the sinner discovered that it comprehended such things as lust, inordinate or excessive desire and greed. This in turn led to idolatry. Idolatry includes the worship of anyone or anything other than, or in addition to, the Lord our God.

Thus, because of his rebellious and disobedient nature, the sinner was inclined to pursue the very things that God's law forbade. Thus, he pursued all forms of lust instead of resisting them or fleeing from them. He pursued excessive desire and greed in all its manifestations, instead of practising moderation and restraint, and instead of showing generosity to others. What was true of the tenth commandment relating to covetousness was true also of every other commandment in God's law that identified and forbade sin.

At one time, however, Paul had not been aware of God's law; or, at least, he had not understood its significance or extent. Under such circumstances, his sinful nature was not aroused to the same extent. Even so, Paul was still a sinner. He still committed sins for which the law justly condemned him. However, being ignorant of God's law, his guilt would have been correspondingly mitigated—although not expunged.

To all intents and purposes, Paul would not have realised that the law condemned him even for the most 'minor' offences. (James 2:10) At that time, he would not have felt the full burden of his sin and guilt as brought home to his heart and conscience by the law. Certainly, his conscience would still have accused him of sin and guilt. This, however, would not have been to the same extent as when the Holy Spirit applied the convicting and convincing power of God's law to his heart, mind and conscience.

Without the presence of the law to highlight, identify and condemn sin, we might say—as Paul says—that sin is 'dead'. That is, it lies dormant or unprovoked to greater evil until exposed by the law for what it really is (v.13; Rom. 5:20a).

Paul explains this further in verse 9:

### Romans 7:9

Before Paul became fully aware of God's law—or of its extent and requirements—he was not fully aware of his own sinfulness. Similarly, he was unaware of his own total inability to live righteously—even if he desired to do so—or in a manner pleasing to God. In his ignorance of God's law, Paul considered himself as a morally upright person, and as sincere and God-fearing as many others. Indeed, when he became a Pharisee and had gained an intellectual knowledge of God's law, Paul thought of himself as extremely zealous in all the things of God. (Phil. 3:4-6)

Before becoming aware of the law, however, Paul was ignorant of sin's evil nature, of his own sinfulness, and of the penalty of the law that demanded death for sin. Similarly, after gaining an intellectual knowledge of God's law, Paul earnestly believed that he would attain life only by strict observance of that law. He remained totally ignorant of the law's true purpose. (This, of course, is true of everyone who has not experienced salvation through faith in Christ.)

Later in his life, Paul came to understand the full meaning and extent of God's holy law. Then, he realised that—although morally upright in men's eyes—God's law condemned him as a sinner. Then, too, Paul saw how evil sin was, and how offensive in the eyes of the most holy God. Suddenly, the formerly dead letter of the law sprang to life. By its living power, the law caused Paul to realise that he was spiritually dead and alienated from God by his sin.

While it could condemn Paul's sin, the law could not by itself show Paul the full extent of his sinful condition. When, however, the Holy Spirit applied the truths of God's law to Paul's heart and conscience, he realised its full significance to his life. Now, Paul realised that God's law condemned him as a sinner. He realised that it pronounced the death penalty on him for his sins. Yet, he also realised that God—in his grace and mercy—was using the law to convict him of sin so that he might lead him to Christ for salvation. (Gal. 3:24)

In verse 10, the apostle continues:

#### **Romans 7:10**

The law of God promised life to anyone who could keep it faultlessly throughout his or her days. No one, of course—except the Son of God himself—was capable of keeping God's law faultlessly. Therefore, those who failed to keep God's law found themselves under the curse and condemnation of the law. They also discovered that the law pronounced upon them the sentence of death. (Gal. 3:10-12)

Was, then, the law at fault in condemning all mankind? Most certainly not! The fault lay with sinful mankind. By their rebellion against God, they had lost the ability to obey God. In addition, they no longer desired to obey God. Rather, they chose to obey sin, and they served it willingly. (Rom. 8:7-8)

To this end, Paul writes in verse 11:

#### **Romans 7:11**

The commandment identified sin for what it was. It forbade any involvement in it, and it condemned those who chose to sin. However, just as the serpent deceived Eve and enticed her to sin, so—by various enticements—all mankind is tempted to indulge in sin. (2 Cor. 11:3)

Yet, these enticements or allurements are deceptive, for they can lead only to misery and death. Those who choose to break God's law, find themselves condemned by that law. Yet, as we have previously inferred, the blame for man's sin and condemnation does not lie with the law, but with sinful mankind himself. In his pride and rebellion, mankind sets himself against God and against his law. (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 4:22; James 1:14-15; see also Obadiah 3)

Thus, concerning God's law, Paul writes in verse 12:

### **Romans 7:12**

The law is holy because the All-Holy, Almighty and Sovereign God handed his Words down to Moses to give to the people. The law represents his glorious standard of righteousness, and it reflects something of God's ineffable character. Individually, the commandments too are holy. They set forth God's standards for his people, and indeed for all mankind. They are righteous, or just, equitable, true and fair. They are good, for they are given not only to glorify God, but also to benefit mankind. They set forth in summary form God's rules for men and women, the observance of which is a guide to daily life, peace and upright living. (Neh. 9:13; Ps. 19:7-12)

Even so, although God's law is intrinsically perfect, it was not intended to lead to (eternal) life—except by perfect obedience to its every demand and requirement. As far as fallen and sinful mankind is concerned, however, the law can only accuse him of sin and condemn him as a sinner. (Rom. 4:15)

This means that no one can be justified by means of the law. This is because the same law that condemns a person and declares him 'guilty' cannot subsequently be used to acquit (or justify) that person and declare him 'not guilty.' When emanating from the same source—God's Law—the two states are mutually exclusive. Therefore, if a sinner is to be justified, he cannot be justified by observing the law, for by the law arises the knowledge of sin (and condemnation of sin). A sinner can be justified only by God's free, sovereign and unmerited grace. (Rom. 3:20-24)

### **Paul's Battle Against Sin**

#### ***Romans 7:13-25***

In verse 13, Paul continues by asking:

#### **Romans 7:13**

The law of God magnifies the grace of God. Thus Paul refutes the idea that the law itself is the cause of sin or death. The law pronounces the death penalty on a person only on account of that person's sin and guilt. (Rom. 5:20-21)

However, God's law goes much further than this. Through listening to what the law says, a person comes to realise just how vile or offensive his sin really is, and how repugnant it is to a most holy God. Under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, a sinner begins to realise that God has condemned him justly for his sin, and that he deserves the full punishment demanded by God's holy law.

Thus, the excellent quality of God's law reveals the utter sinfulness of a person's sin. This, however, also proves to that person that the law can never justify him, since it has already condemned him for his sin. Therefore, it compels the sinner to look elsewhere for mercy, forgiveness and salvation. Thus, God puts the law in charge of our conscience, to lead us to Christ. (Gal. 3:21-24)

But why is it impossible for a person to do all that God's law requires? Paul answers this from verse 14 onward:

#### **Romans 7:14**

The law is excellent, for it is God's law. The law is spiritual, for it was given by the Divine Lawgiver and Judge. The law is perfect, for it reflects the character and glory of God. (Deut. 6:5-7; Prov. 30:5a) No fault, therefore, can ever attach to the law. As Paul declares



in verse 13 above, the commandment is holy, righteous and good. The fault lies with fallen mankind for breaking God's law, for failing to keep God's law, and for falling short of its requirements. (Rom. 3:23) The law is spiritual or divine, but we are unspiritual, mortal and carnal. We cannot keep God's law because sin enslaves us and drags us away from that which is right, good and beneficial for our souls.

It is true that—in the redeemed—sin no longer exercises dominion. Yet, the sinful nature is still present. Given the least opportunity, this old nature will still attempt to ensnare us or entice us away from God's holy Word. This is why it is essential that we walk by the Spirit and do not rely on human effort or human strength to enable us to live the Christian life.

Paul says that he is sold as a slave to sin. He is not his own master. Sin has taken him captive and bound him as with an iron chain. This is precisely the situation—not specifically of the unregenerate—but of any one of God's people when they yield to sin's enslaving power, instead of yielding to the Spirit's delivering power. Yet, at one time or another, it is true of every one of God's children—just as it was true of Paul. (Matt. 16:23; 1 Cor. 3:1-3)

This demonstrates the nature of the warfare upon which God's people are called upon to engage. They must arm themselves with the weapons drawn from God's spiritual armoury, for they are fighting against the spiritual forces of evil. It is these spiritual forces of evil that endeavour to draw the people of God back into sinful slavery. Yet, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can have the victory, as later Paul will declare. (Eph. 6:10-18)

By abiding, therefore, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and living by the power of God's Holy Spirit, we can be assured of victory, through faith, over the old sinful nature within. Firstly, however, Paul continues to testify to the nature of the battle he is waging against sin in his own daily life. Thus, in verse 15, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 7:15**

In this author's opinion, these are not the words of an unregenerate person. Paul is expressing the anguish within his soul as a regenerated believer who is battling against the spiritual forces of evil, and against the claims of his old sinful nature. The same situation holds true for every other child of God—as the book of Job and the Psalms of David amply illustrate. (Ps. 19:12-13; 65:3; Eccl. 7:20)

Paul desires with all his heart to do what is right in God's eyes, and to honour the Lord's name. However, because of the pull of the old sinful nature still within him, the apostle finds great difficulty at times in carrying this out. In fact, on occasions, Paul has to admit that temptation and sin gain the upper hand, causing him to do the very thing that he hates, or for which he later despises himself. (Gal. 5:17; James 3:2; 1 John 1:7-10)

In verse 16, the apostle continues:

#### **Romans 7:16**

How could Paul agree within himself that the law is good (i.e. excellent, holy, righteous, true and beneficial for the soul, and indeed the whole person), if he could not understand it from the perspective of a spiritually renewed man? (vv.12,22; cf. Ps. 119:127-128)

When Paul does what he hates, he acknowledges that the law is good, and that it justly condemns him for breaking its requirements. Probably, the apostle felt this to be especially true of failing to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and failing to love his neighbour as himself.

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Paul, of course, was living under grace, not under law. Even so, as the two Great Commandments illustrate, the moral and ethical standards of the law still apply. In this respect, Paul was very much aware of his shortcomings. (Cf. Matt. 5:19)

Granted, neither the apostle's salvation nor ours depend on observance of the law. Rather, it depends entirely on God's grace. Yet, the apostle begins to realise just to what extent he must depend on God's grace to change him and to keep him from falling into sin. Similarly, Paul must have been made acutely aware of just how much the Holy Spirit still needed to cleanse and sanctify his life in order to prepare him for future glory in the presence of the Lord.

In verse 17, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 7:17**

Paul is not evading responsibility for his actions. Yet, what he does at times is completely opposed to what he wants to do, and knows he should do. Such is the power of the old sinful nature still within all believers. It is true, of course, that we ought to reckon our old sinful nature as crucified with Christ. At times, however, we fail to do this consistently. As a result, we find ourselves doing the very things we hate and despise. (Cf. Gal. 5:24)

Paul says it is no longer he who does it—meaning that it is not what he, in his renewed self, wants to do. Rather, it is what the old sinful desires within him entices or compels him to do.

Is there, then, no victory over sin? Yes, indeed there is—although not total in this life. Christ died to achieve victory over sin and to free us from slavery to sin's demands. In practical everyday living, however, we enjoy this freedom from sin and its slavery only insofar as we follow Christ and submit wholeheartedly to his rule over us. (Rom. 12:1-2) We must live under his sovereign power and authority, and we must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. Among other things, this means we must not depend on human effort to overcome, but on the grace of God alone. For that grace—and only that grace—is sufficient for our every need. (2 Cor. 12:9; James 4:6-7)

If, however, we should take our eyes (of faith) off the Lord Jesus Christ, or fail to walk closely with him or abide in him, then we will find ourselves being enticed by our old sinful nature. At such times, we may find ourselves doing something that we know is wrong, and that we utterly hate. (John 15:4-11; Gal. 5:17) Yet, God remains faithful, even when we prove unfaithful to him. He knows our every weakness. When we acknowledge our sin and confess it to God, he will forgive that sin and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9-10)

In verse 18, the apostle gives us a further insight into the spiritual battle that he—and other children of God—must wage against the old sinful nature:

### **Romans 7:18**

Two points here indicate that Paul is referring to his post-conversion life in this passage:

The apostle speaks of his sinful nature in a manner that implies that this nature was, or should be, part of his old pre-conversion life. Only a converted person could discriminate in this manner between the old nature and the (implied) new nature in Christ. (Rom. 8:9)

Paul asserts that he has the desire to do what is good. As a rule, however, those who are in the flesh (the unregenerate) have no desire to do what is good in the manner spoken of by Paul. That is, they have no inherent desire or inclination to pursue holiness of life, or to live a life to the praise, honour and glory of God. (Rom. 8:7-8)

Paul confesses that, of himself, he is totally unable to do what he wants to do. Relying on human strength or ability alone, this is true of every child of God. However, as Paul will later reveal, neither he nor we need depend on merely human resources for living a God-honouring and holy life. (Phil. 2:12)

Before coming to this subject, however, the apostle has yet more to tell us about the spiritual warfare that he—and we—must engage upon, in order to overcome at last.

Thus, in verse 19, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 7:19**

Clearly, Paul has been enduring a real battle against the desires and inclinations of his old sinful nature. Yet, God is not permitting him to pass through those arduous and distressing circumstances without very good reason. The Lord loves his children, and he desires only the best for each one of them. However, those whom God loves, he must discipline or train in perseverance and in holiness of life. (Heb. 12:5-7)

Paul's experiences were intended—in part at least—to show him his own utter helplessness, and to cause him to rely entirely on the grace of God for his daily living. Only God's grace would suffice him in his time of need. If at any time, however, the apostle attempted to live the Christian life in his own strength, he would soon come to realise how weak he really was. He could not do the good he wanted to do. On the contrary, the evil he hated and did not wish to do, he kept on doing.

Paul, then, reveals to us that—even in the regenerate—the old sinful nature is still able to exert an evil and powerful influence over the mind and will; unless subdued by the power and grace of God. Accepting, therefore, that he was engaged in a spiritual warfare between his old and new natures, the apostle writes in verse 20:

### **Romans 7:20**

What Paul does, he does unwillingly and contrary to his conscience and most earnest desires. This faithful servant of God hates what he does at times, and he disassociates himself from these evil acts. This does not mean that Paul is refusing to accept responsibility for them in the sight of God. Rather, it means that they are not typical of his life as a whole, but are unwelcome expressions of his old sinful nature. His life as a whole, however, has been given over to the service and glory of Christ his Lord and Master. With his utmost endeavour, therefore, the apostle aims at holiness of life—striving by God's grace and by the Holy Spirit's enabling power to reach his goal.

Yet, these occasional sinful episodes in the apostle's life must have caused him immense grief, distress and disturbance of mind and soul. Even so, God's grace would ever remain sufficient to deliver Paul and to keep the apostle secure in his everlasting arms. This is true of every one of God's redeemed children; even when they feel as Paul felt about severe temptations to sin. (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 12:9) Therefore, we must not permit any disturbance of mind or conscience on account of sin or sinful episodes to cause us to doubt the wisdom, power, grace or faithfulness of God. For he who loves his children, will keep his children safe. (Jude 24)

By his providence, the Lord taught Paul a very hard, but necessary, lesson in living the Christian life: Those whom God calls to faith in his Son do not immediately gain total victory over all sin in their lives—however much they may desire this. Justification is an immediate and once-for-all act whereby God declares the believing sinner to be righteous in his sight. Sanctification (or the imparting of righteousness and holiness of life) is, however, a life-long process. We will not, therefore, be completely free from sin until the Lord completes our sanctification in glorification.

Paul, therefore, arrives at the conclusion expressed from verses 21 onward:

### **Romans 7:21**

Basically, a law is a code of conduct, a standard of behaviour, or a rule of action. Up to this point, the apostle has been referring primarily to God's most holy and righteous law as summarised in the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments are expressed even more succinctly in the two Great Commandments. (Matt. 22:36-40)

In verse 21, however, Paul is not referring to God's law, or even more generally, to the truths of God's Word. Rather, the apostle is referring to a law or principle of evil that he finds operating within his own being. This principle, however, is just as regular and demanding as any external law or code of conduct. Paul desires deeply to do good and to honour the Lord consistently. However, on account of this inward evil principle, the apostle finds that frequently sin presents itself to his mind as a viable and desirable alternative. (Ps. 40:12-13; 65:3)

Paul, of course, freely admits that this alternative is wrong, for it is contrary to the will of God. However, the apostle acknowledges that he must battle against the temptation to sin when, in reality, he earnestly desires to do only that which is good and right.

Paul further explains this situation in the verses following:

### **Romans 7:22**

Only a person who knew the Lord, and who had experienced the regenerating power of God's Holy Spirit could have written this verse. Those who are still in the flesh (the unregenerate) can never say that they delight in God's law; for, manifestly, this would not be true. (Rom. 8:7-8) For the believer, however, there is great delight in learning the law of the Lord—or the Word of God—and in walking in the light of that law. This is the truth that brings freedom and life to the soul, for this law is God's living Word, and through it the Holy Spirit imparts energising power to our lives. (Ps. 1:2; 19:8-10; Prov. 6:23; John 6:63)

In verse 23, however, the apostle acknowledges the presence of another, and sinister, law within him. Thus, Paul writes:

### **Romans 7:23**

This evil principle or law sorely tempts the apostle to use various parts of his body in a sinful manner or for sinful purposes. Through this evil principle acting on his mind, every part of his body is enticed to sin. This includes the abuse or misuse of his eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, and every other member of his body or faculty of his mind. (Cf. Rom. 6:13,19)

Thus Paul—and every other believer before and since—finds himself at war with the passions and desires of his old sinful nature. In his mind—that is, in his renewed mind—the apostle delights in God's law, or in the teachings of God's Word. With all his heart, he desires to live by these teachings, as God's grace enables him. However, the evil principle of sin in his old nature still endeavours to captivate his mind and drag him back into the slavery of sin—the very slavery from which Christ has set him free. (Eccl. 7:20; Gal. 5:17; Heb. 12:4; James 4:1)

Humanly speaking, Paul seems to be caught in an impossible situation. Thus, in verse 24, the apostle exclaims:

**Romans 7:24**

Paul may not have realised it at the time, but by bringing him to such depths of despair and helplessness, the Lord was teaching him a lesson. He was revealing to Paul that he could not rely on his own efforts or inherent moral strength to live the Christian life. Rather, by showing him his own utter powerlessness to overcome the sinful nature, the Lord was causing Paul to cast himself utterly upon his grace, and to depend on the Lord entirely for deliverance. (Cf. Ps. 38:4-8,17,21-22; 130:1-4; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 12:7-10)

Yes, the apostle would still need to contend against the enticements of the old sinful nature, but by the grace of God he would overcome. No, the apostle would not attain to perfection in this life, but by the grace of God he would press on toward the mark. (Phil. 3:12-14) When he stumbled into sin, Paul would not stumble insofar that he would fall away from God's grace. On the contrary, God in his grace would keep him from falling (fatally and finally), and God in his mercy would forgive him when he stumbled into sin.

How, then, will Paul—and every other believer—find deliverance from this body of death? The apostle gives us the answer in verse 25:

**Romans 7:25**

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, deliverance is assured. On the cross, Jesus conquered sin. So can we, so long as we abide in him and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we give thanks unto God that we are not left to our own devices—helpless and unable to find deliverance from slavery to sin. Christ is our victory! (Ps. 107:15-22; Rom. 6:17-18; 8:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:57)

Paul then concludes this chapter by declaring that—insofar as his (renewed) mind is concerned, he is God's willing and obedient slave. His joy is to obey the law of God or the Word of God. He does so, however, not in a legalistic sense, but out of a sense of love and devotion for the one who loved him, redeemed him and set him free.

Yet, Paul also acknowledges that—insofar as his old sinful nature is concerned—he is still tempted by its evil desires. However, he knows that if he yields to this evil principle within, this will lead him back again into slavery to sin. Therefore, by the grace of God, he, like Timothy, must continue to fight the good fight of the faith. (1 Tim. 6:11-12) From moment to moment, then, he must abide in Christ, and depend upon his sustaining power. For the people of God, deliverance will come. For God will guard the feet of all his saints, and upholds all those who fall. (John 15:4; 1 Sam. 2:9)

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## Romans Chapter 8

### No Condemnation

#### ***Romans 8:1-17***

#### **Romans 8:1-4**

We come now to chapter 8 of Paul's epistle to the Romans. This chapter is not merely a continuation of the apostle's remarks in the latter part of chapter 7 where he described his battle against sin—although this is included. However, the apostle also includes much more; especially in connection with justification and sanctification. Paul had written about these subjects earlier in this letter. Now, however, the apostle shows what practical effects they ought to have on the believer's daily life.

Thus, to remind the believers at Rome—and us—of their present standing in the sight of God, Paul begins chapter 8 with these words:

#### **Romans 8:1**

Condemnation or judgment relates to law; or, more specifically, to the breaking of law or failure to observe the law. In this case, the law concerned is the law of God. In his law, God justly condemns sinners for their transgression of his law. The law also pronounces upon everyone who breaks it the due penalty of his or her transgression, which is death. As we have seen, no sinner can find deliverance either from sin or from this sentence of death by his futile attempts to keep God's law, or by any other human means. (Gal. 3:10-11)

We have seen also, however, that God sent his one and only Son into the world to atone for sin. When he came, the Lord Jesus completely fulfilled the law and satisfied all its demands against sinners. Thus, God is able to justify every sinner who—in repentance and faith—calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. God is able also to release that person from the law's legal demands. In addition, God releases the repentant and believing sinner from the condemnation of the law, because Christ died as the sinner's substitute. (Gal. 3:13-14) Therefore, declares Paul assuredly and triumphantly, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (v.1).

Paul expands on this declaration of faith and assurance by writing in verse 2:

#### **Romans 8:2**

Here, Paul contrasts two opposing principles: that which leads to death, and that which leads to life. It is an acknowledged truth or principle of the Bible and of experience that sin results in death. In the Bible, of course, death is a threefold entity: It comprises *spiritual* death, *physical* death, and *eternal* death.

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By way of reminder, we may summarise the concept of biblical death very briefly as follows:

- *Spiritual death* is alienation from God, and enmity with God, in this life.
- *Physical death* is the temporary death and dissolution of the body, until the resurrection and final judgment when the body will be raised.
- *Eternal death* is final and everlasting separation from God and from his love, mercy and grace, in that place of torments described as 'the lake of fire'.

In marked contrast to the law or principle of sin that brings death, is the law or principle of the Spirit who brings life. All those who are in Christ Jesus have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit unto newness of life. (2 Cor. 5:17)

Newness of life comprehends the new birth, together with the gifts of abundant life and eternal life. However, the new life imparted to the redeemed sinner by the Spirit of God comprises more than this. Among other things, the law or principle of life in the Spirit sets the believer free from the law or principle of sin leading to death. No longer is the believer a slave to sin, for sin no longer dominates his mind or his life. (John 8:34-36; Rom. 6:18,22)

God requires of his children that they walk or live in the power of the Spirit, and that they do not rely on 'the flesh'; i.e. on human effort or human resources. So long as they rely on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and provided they apply the truths of God's Word to their hearts and lives, then God's grace and the Spirit's power will keep them in the good and right way.

In the first part of verse 3, the apostle Paul continues:

### **Romans 8:3a**

In every respect, the law of God is perfect. It sets forth God's standards of righteousness. It justly condemns those who fail to observe these standards.

When Adam disobeyed God's command, he fell from the state of righteousness in which God had created him. From this point, Adam became a sinner. His nature—his inner character—became morally corrupt. Consequently, all mankind inherits from Adam a corrupt and sinful nature. For this reason, mankind finds it impossible to keep the righteous requirements of God's law to the standard God requires. Thus, the law is powerless to save fallen mankind from their sins, or to provide him with righteousness or life. The law itself, of course, is not at fault. Rather, the fault lies with fallen mankind for being unable and unwilling to keep God's law because of his own sinful mind. (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:21-22)

God's law, therefore, justly condemns mankind for the sins they commit. The law, however, cannot justify men or women for their righteous acts, because even the very best of fallen mankind's righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's sight. (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:20) Sinners, therefore, could not find forgiveness, justification, or life through any attempts at keeping God's law. In his measureless love and abundant grace and mercy, however, God provided sinful men and women with an alternative method of forgiveness, justification, and life. (Rom. 3:21-26)

In order to fulfil every requirement of his most holy law, God sent his own Son into the world to deal with sin. Jesus took upon himself full and true humanity, yet without divesting himself of his divinity. The holy Son of God assumed the form and likeness of sinful man, yet he did not assume their sin or their sinful nature. The Lord was, and remained, totally sin-free. He was, therefore, the only person perfectly qualified to live a life of complete and unwavering obedience to God. He did this—not only on his own behalf—but also on behalf of sinners. Again, the Son of God was the only person perfectly qualified to lay down



his life voluntarily and as an atoning sacrifice—not on his own behalf—but exclusively as a substitute for sinners.

The Bible says that Jesus bore our sins in his own body to the tree. This, however, does not mean that Christ was made a sinner for us. Christ was never at any time contaminated by our sin. When he died on the cross ‘bearing our sins’, the Son of God was in fact bearing the legal liability and moral responsibility for our sins. The Lord Jesus was paying the penalty demanded by God’s law on our behalf. Throughout his sufferings, however, Jesus remained the holy, spotless and sinless Son of God. (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; see esp. 1 Pet. 1:19)

God’s purpose in sending his Son into the world to accomplish the work of redemption is explained further in verses 3b and 4:

#### **Romans 8:3b-4**

Christ died as a sin offering. He died to fulfil every demand of God’s law against the guilty and hell-deserving sinner, thereby making atonement for their sins. The effect of this propitiatory or atoning sacrifice was to fully satisfy the righteousness of God and to turn aside his holy wrath against sin and against the unforgiven sinner. In this way, God forgives, justifies and reconciles to himself every person who calls upon the name of his Son.

In justifying repentant and believing sinners, God pronounces them righteous in his sight. God, however, does not pronounce them righteous because they have obeyed his law—for manifestly they have failed to obey his law. Rather, God declares them righteous because his own Son has obeyed the entire law on their behalf. Again, when he died on the cross, Jesus met every requirement of the law against the sinner—including the sinner’s condemnation, together with the penalty of death.

As we know, however, the Lord Jesus did not remain in the grave. On the third day he arose. Because of his life and work, and because of his death and resurrection, God not only justifies the believer sinner, but he also clothes him with the perfect righteousness of Christ. Thus, Paul can say that God’s law is met fully in us—on account of Christ’s perfect work on our behalf, and because God has reckoned his Son’s perfect righteousness to us.

The Lord, of course, expects each one of us to follow the way of righteousness and life—not the way of sin and death. Thus, at all times, we must endeavour—with God’s help—to live under the controlling power and influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and not under the latent power and influence of the old inherently sinful nature. (Gal. 5:19-26)

### **Peace or Turmoil Within**

#### **Romans 8:5-8**

To explain these points further, the apostle writes in verse 5:

#### **Romans 8:5**

A person belongs to one of two categories: either he is carnally, fleshly or worldly-minded, or he is spiritually minded and committed to living a holy and godly life. In the latter case, this is because that person has submitted his mind to the Holy Spirit’s controlling and sanctifying power and influence.

A person may decide to follow the course of this world, and to adapt his thinking and attitudes to conform to this world’s (or this age’s) standards of behaviour. Consequently, that person will yield to those old sinful inclinations and desires arising within him. To follow

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this course, however, is to follow the way of spiritual misery and ruin, leading ultimately to death. (Phil. 3:18-19) If, however, a person decides—by God's grace—to follow the way of the Lord rather than the way of the world, then that person shows that he has set his heart and mind on those things that the Holy Spirit desires. (Col. 3:1-4)

The Spirit of God within the believer desires only those things that honour God's name and that cause the believer to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. The Spirit sanctifies us thereby producing an increasingly holy (but not yet perfect) life. Again, by the Spirit of God within us, we learn to show greater love for God and to those around us. Additionally, when we are being led or controlled by the Spirit and guided by God's Word, we learn to produce the fruit of the Spirit in ever-increasing measure. (Rom. 12:13)

In verse 6, the apostle illustrates the two paths, and their results:

### Romans 8:6

The Bible and experience teaches us that setting our hearts and minds on the things of the sinful nature leads to death. It leads, firstly, to spiritual death, including misery and ruin. Ultimately, it leads to eternal death. On the other hand, however, the Bible and experience teaches us that setting our hearts and minds on the things of the Spirit leads not only to life, but also to peace. (Gal. 6:8)

Only by following the way of the Spirit can we find abundant and eternal life. Again, only by following the way of the Spirit can we experience that deep, lasting peace and joy within our hearts that comes from God above. Since this peace comes from the Lord himself, then—unlike the peace (so-called) that the world promises—God's peace remains with us forever. We may not always sense its presence—but the peace that God gives to his children is as permanent and unchanging as the eternal God himself. (John 14:27; 16:33) So long as we continue to walk by the Spirit, trusting and obeying God's Word, that peace will remain alive in our hearts and consciences. Our innermost being will be flooded not only with this peace, but also with the love and joy that the Holy Spirit imparts to our souls. (Rom. 5:1; 14:17; 15:13)

This peace, however, can be experienced only by those whose sins God has forgiven, and whom he has reconciled to himself through Christ's atoning blood. (Rom. 5:9-11) Therefore, in verse 7, the apostle Paul writes:

### Romans 8:7

God's Word says, "There is no peace for the wicked." (Isa. 48:22) Why is this? Because, to have peace in one's heart, a person must know that God has forgiven his sins, and that he is no longer God's enemy on account of his sinful nature and sinful deeds. (Col. 1:21) This, however, is the very position occupied by everyone who is still outside of Christ and alienated from God. They stand condemned—justly—for their sins. They stand condemned for not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and in the message of the gospel. Even now, they are abiding under God's wrath and curse. (John 3:36; Gal. 3:10)

It is, therefore, impossible for any unforgiven sinner to experience true or lasting peace in his or her heart. Indeed, in accord with the truth of God's Word, it is much more likely that he will experience turmoil of heart and soul. Thus, he will experience a complete lack of real peace—not only with God, but also with others and with himself. His own conscience constantly accuses and condemns him. Deep within, he knows that he possesses no grounds for peace or assurance, but only of condemnation and judgment—both now and in the future.

Thus, the sinful mind is completely hostile to God and to his Word. It not only refuses to submit to God's law, it is incapable of doing so. It can only rebel against God and against

the truths of his Word. It will attempt by every means possible to evade the truths of God's Word, to attempt to discredit it (albeit, futilely), or to explain it away. (Ps. 53:1) Such is the desperation and rebellious state of mind of those who have given themselves over to satisfying their own evil desires. (Eph. 4:18-19; cf. Rom. 1:28-32)

Paul, therefore, concludes this paragraph by writing in verse 8:

### **Romans 8:8**

Outwardly, a person may appear good, upright and just. That person may perform many praiseworthy deeds; e.g. to help others. He may do many things for which the world commends him, and which may even convince other people that such a person must surely have God's approval and blessing on his life. This, however, is not necessarily the case. A person may do all these things and more. Yet, if his heart is not right with God, and if he has not experienced forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, then clearly that person is still in his sins. Whatever good he may perform, his mind is still controlled by his sinful nature. He cannot, therefore, please God. (Rom. 7:5)

This verse proves convincingly that it is utterly impossible for a sinner to merit God's approval by good works or good deeds. Because of the pollution of his sinful nature, all his righteous acts are—to God—like filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6)

### **Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

#### **Romans 8:9-14**

This situation, however, does not apply to those whose sins God has forgiven, and who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. They are the beloved children of God, and to each of them, God has given the gift of his Holy Spirit. Thus, concerning God's redeemed children, the apostle is able to write in verse 9:

#### **Romans 8:9**

In writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul is assured that they have not set their minds on the things of the sinful nature, but rather on the things of the Holy Spirit. Granted, some of these believers might be less spiritually mature and less advanced in holiness of life than others. Even so, Paul believes that they are all heading in the same direction in order to please and honour the Lord in their daily lives.

The apostle Paul remains confident, therefore, that these Roman Christians are not permitting the sinful nature to control or dominate their minds or their lives. On the contrary, he believes that they have submitted themselves to Christ and that they are permitting the Spirit of God to influence and control their whole being. This becomes more evident when Paul says at the beginning of this epistle to the Romans that their faith was being spoken of throughout the whole (known) world. (Rom. 1:8)

For anyone to be controlled by the Spirit of Christ, it should be evident that the Spirit of Christ must live within them; as was the case with these Roman believers. The Spirit of Christ (or the Spirit of God) is the mark and seal that identifies a person as belonging to Christ and to God. Anyone, however, who does not possess the indwelling Holy Spirit, does not belong to Christ or to God. That person is still unregenerate; he is still in his sins. (Gal. 4:6-7)

In passing, we should note that the apostle Paul uses the expressions *Spirit of God* and *Spirit of Christ* interchangeably. This is evidence of the unity of the Godhead. It is also evidence of the fact that the Holy Spirit is equal in power, glory and eternity with the Father

and with the Son. Again, it demonstrates that the Holy Spirit can be said to come from (or be sent by) either the Father or the Son—or by both.

In verse 10, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 8:10**

The Lord Jesus dwells within the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. Our body has become the temple of the Spirit; therefore we ought to consecrate it to him. (John 14:23; 2 Cor. 13:5)

Similarly, since Christ has redeemed us in body and soul, our lives are not our own. We belong to the Lord. Again, our body is now dead because of sin, or in respect to sin. This is due partly to the fact that Christ has dealt with sin on our behalf, and partly also to the fact that—as God’s redeemed children—we are expected to put to death the desires of the sinful nature and the misdeeds of the body. (2 Cor. 5:21)

In the latter part of verse 10, Paul says that ...*your spirit is alive because of righteousness* (v10b). Commentators are divided as to whether Paul is referring to the human spirit or our innermost being, or to the Holy Spirit. Those who believe Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit support their argument by saying that all other occurrences of the Greek word, *pneuma*, in this passage clearly refer to the Holy Spirit. If the word ‘spirit’ here does not refer to the Holy Spirit, then this would be an unexpected exception.

Those who believe that Paul is referring to a person’s own spirit, support their argument by saying that this was indeed an intended exception to the other occurrences. Paul, they say, is speaking about the *effects* of God’s Holy Spirit on the believer’s innermost being—including his mind. He is not speaking about the Holy Spirit himself.

Either way, it amounts to much the same thing in the end. Our own spirit is alive to God and to righteousness only because the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and created new life within us, and because he has completely renewed our souls. It is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that maintains our own spirit in living and vital union and communion with God and with his Son. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating us and bringing us to repentance and faith in Christ, that God has justified us or credited us with righteousness. Our spirit, therefore, is alive to God and to righteousness only because of what God—by his Spirit—has done for us in regeneration, and what he is continuing to do for us in sanctification.

In verse 11, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 8:11**

The Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead is, of course, the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, the Word of God says that Jesus arose from the dead (by his own power). (John 10:18) At other times, the Scriptures say that the Father raised his Son from the dead. (Acts 2:24,32; 5:30; 13:30,34) Yet again—as here—God’s Word says that the Father raised Christ from the dead, operating through the person and agency of his Holy Spirit. (Rom. 8:11)

This simply demonstrates the inseparable unity of the Godhead as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What one person in the Godhead is said to do or accomplish, either of the others equally may be said to do or accomplish. There is, therefore, no contradiction expressed or implied in the varying accounts of who raised Christ, or any other similar issue.

To return to the present verse (v.11), Paul says that the same Holy Spirit by whom the Father raised his Son from the dead was living in the hearts and lives of each child of God. Throughout the believer's life, the Holy Spirit continues to seal us unto the Father. He continues to act as the deposit, pledge or guarantee of the believer's final salvation. Also, the indwelling Spirit of God continues to sanctify the believer's life, preparing him for future glory in the presence of the Lord. In these ways, God's Spirit is even now giving (renewed) life to our present mortal bodies.

Our present mortal bodies, however, will die eventually (unless prevented by the Lord's coming). Yet, acting by the same almighty power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, the Lord will raise from the dead every one of his redeemed people. Then, he will glorify them and present them faultless and blameless before his Father in heaven. (Acts 2:32-33; 1 Pet. 1:21; Rom. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 6:14; Phil. 3:21)

This, then, is the grand assurance that Paul gives to these believers at Rome—and to us also. Christ has died, and has risen again. Though we die, we too will rise again. Christ has been raised to glory in the presence of his Father. We too will be raised to glory, to serve and worship before God and before the Lamb. Since this will be so, then—even now—we ought to be living our lives in a way that honours and glorifies the name of the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:14-17)

To this end, Paul writes in verse 12:

#### **Romans 8:12**

God has given us his Holy Spirit. The Spirit seals us as belonging exclusively to our Father in heaven and to his Son. He also sanctifies us in our walk with God. Thus, we are under obligation to learn the ways of the Lord, and to honour him in and with our lives.

God has redeemed us with the precious blood of his Son. Our lives, therefore, now belong to him, and he may choose to use them as he sees fit. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) However, we must use our lives only for good and honourable purposes. This means we must deny ourselves anything that is evil, questionable, or dishonourable. Indeed, we must put to death all the desires arising from our old sinful nature, and live instead in the power of God's Holy Spirit. (Rom. 6:12-14)

Thus, in verses 13 and 14, the apostle Paul writes:

#### **Romans 8:13-14**

If we were to live only to satisfy the desires of the old sinful nature, then this would result in death. This is the inevitable consequence of feeding the mind on sinful things. Ultimately, this course of action produces an ever-increasing level of tolerance to sin, and indulgence in sinful thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. This, however, is the way of death and destruction (vv.5-8; Gal. 6:8).

Yet, there is a far better way for those in whom God's Spirit dwells. We cannot overcome sinful desires by human self-effort. However, if we trust in the Lord and in the power of his Holy Spirit, he will enable us to put to death the misdeeds of the body. This includes those sinful deeds that our evil thoughts entice us to perform or to engage in. (Titus 2:11-12) Thus, by the Spirit's sanctifying power working within us, we will experience a life that is free from oppression by sinful deeds and from a guilty and accusing conscience. It will be life that is free and abundant, because we derive that life from our union with Christ Jesus and from the Spirit of the living God within us (vv.1-6).

## **Children and Heirs**

### **Romans 8:15-17**

In verse 14, Paul wrote:

*14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (NIV)*

We are known to be the children of God because of certain evidences in our lives. One such evidence is the fruit that the Holy Spirit causes us to produce. When it becomes obvious that we are intent on forsaking our former sinful practices, and pursuing a truly godly lifestyle, this proves the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus, our new lives in Christ Jesus are characterised by such qualities as love, compassion, kindness, peace, gentleness, and humility. (Gal. 5:22-25)

These godly qualities are completely opposed to the characteristics of the sinful nature, and can proceed only from a truly regenerated and sanctified life. But, if regenerated and sanctified, then the Spirit of God dwells within us, identifying us as the sons and daughters of God.

In verse 15, Paul writes:

### **Romans 8:15**

When the Lord redeemed us, he made us his own children. He gave us his Holy Spirit. No longer, then, do we need to live in fear of the future or of death; or in fear of judgment for unforgiven sin. No longer are we slaves to sin, to Satan or to self. (John 8:32-36; Heb. 2:15; 1 John 4:18) Now, we are the children of God. Now, we have received the Spirit of sonship or adoption into the family of God. Now—because of God's Holy Spirit within us—we are able to cry out to God as our Father in heaven. (Gal. 4:5-6) We know, too, that this is a Father who loves his children, who knows their every need, and who will provide for them accordingly—out of the abundant riches of his grace.

The fact that we are God's own children is confirmed by what the apostle says in the next verse:

### **Romans 8:16**

The Bible provides us with an external and objective testimony to the fact that we are God's children by regeneration or the new birth, and by adoption. In addition, however, to this external testimony, is the internal testimony of God's Holy Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit testifies with our own human spirit that God has made us his own children. (1 John 5:10) This internal witness to the truth, of course, cannot be experienced by anyone who has not received the Spirit of God. Everyone, however, in whom God's Spirit dwells, and whom the Spirit is sanctifying from day to day, has this testimony within themselves. Thus, when added to the testimony of the Bible, we have unequivocal evidence that God has made us his own children, and that we are entitled to call him our Father in heaven.

Yet, being the children of God brings with it great privileges and responsibilities. Thus, in verse 17, Paul writes:

### **Romans 8:17**

Children are heirs to their parent's estate. This is certainly true of natural-born children. At the time Paul was writing, however—and possibly for many centuries later—it was not always or necessarily true of adopted children. Adopted children could be excluded from the rights of inheritance—at least, until more recent times.

This situation, however, could never have arisen with the children of God. None of God's redeemed children will ever find himself excluded from his inheritance in Christ. That inheritance is guaranteed to every genuine child of God. They are the Lord's by regeneration (corresponding to the new birth), as well as by adoption. Thus, they are not only heirs of God, but also joint heirs with the Son of God—the Lord Jesus Christ. (Gal. 4:7)

Those, however, whom the Spirit calls to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he also calls to suffer for the sake of Christ. These very sufferings, hardships and trials are designed to prove the reality of our faith. More than this, however, the Lord has designed these trials to strengthen us in our faith, and to help mould our character as men and women of God. (Phil. 1:29-30; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7)

Thus, when trials and sufferings come—as come they must—we ought not to become disheartened or discouraged. Rather, we should accept them as coming from the hands of our loving heavenly Father. He knows what is best for us, and he will surely lead us in the way that is right for our souls. God will also give us the necessary grace and strength to endure the trial and withstand the suffering. Thus, by remaining faithful to God, we will one day enter into that wonderful and glorious inheritance awaiting us in our Father's home.

## **All Creation Anticipates Renewal**

### ***Romans 8:18-25***

While we anticipate a glorious inheritance in heaven, we must continue to live our lives on this earth often amidst much suffering, sorrow, pain or grief. Yet, we do not dwell on these temporary things, but on those things that are eternal. These are the things that God has prepared for us in glory, and in which we rejoice—even in our present sufferings. Thus, to the believers at Rome, the apostle Paul writes in verse 18:

#### **Romans 8:18**

In this world, and throughout our lives, we may endure much sorrow, suffering and trials. God, however, has called us not only to believe on his Son, but also to suffer for his sake. Thus, even in this world, God can and does richly bless us in or through our sufferings. He strengthens us in his grace and in our faith. He encourages us to persevere in our faith with patience and endurance. (1 Pet. 1:6-9)

Through these trials, the Lord purifies our souls and purges our hearts from dross. In all these things and more, God continues to prepare us for future and eternal glory. So great is this glory, however, that all the sufferings of this world added together could not begin to compare with it, or even set before us an adequate contrast. This glory will far exceed our present trials. Thus, knowing that God is faithful, we have an eternal hope in him and in his unailing promises toward us. (2 Cor. 4:17-18)

Paul's mention of future glory for the believer causes the apostle to recall why man lost his place in God's earthly paradise. Paul also recalls why man lost many of the benefits of God's natural creation because of the Lord's curse on the earth. These things resulted from Adam's sin and fall from grace. However, just as God planned the redemption and restoration of fallen human beings, so also God planned the redemption and restoration of the natural world that he had cursed. To this end, Paul begins by declaring in verse 19:

#### **Romans 8:19**

Paul envisages the entire natural creation (excluding mankind whom he mentions separately) as eagerly longing for and looking forward to, the sons of God to be revealed. It is

as though God's creation—or at least that part of the creation affected by the curse—is anticipating the day when God will complete the redemption of all his children. Then, they will be revealed in all their glory as the children of God. Then, all creation will see revealed in their lives and character the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Then all creation will rejoice together when they behold the Lamb of God, together with all the blood-bought children that God has given him. Now, they are glorified, living and reigning with Christ for ever and ever.

But just as God has transformed and glorified all his redeemed children, so also God will transform and glorify every other element of his natural creation. Thus, in verses 20 and 21, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 8:20-21**

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, God placed a curse on the earth; i.e. on the entire natural creation over which God had given (delegated) dominion to mankind. Thereafter, an otherwise perfectly created earth began to produce thorns, thistles and many other weeds and noxious pests. (Gen. 3:17-19; 5:29b) Similarly, and as a result of the curse, illness, disease, decay and disaster entered the world of nature. All these things and many others adversely affected both mankind and animals in various ways. (Isa. 24:5-6; Hosea 4:1-3)

This is just one example of how God subjected the creation to frustration: That is, to a situation where unwanted plants, crops, diseases etc., prevented faultless reproduction and progression. Rather, these things hindered man, and created considerable difficulties for him as he attempted to tame the earth, and also to combat illness and disease among mankind.

Verse 21, however, assures us that one day God will change this situation for the better. At a time predetermined by God, the Lord will redeem and regenerate this present created world. He will free the earth from the curse, and release it from its bondage to decay. (Rev. 22:3) Thus, God will restore the whole creation so that it resembles his original perfect creation (before the fall of man and the curse on the ground). Then, the new earth will become a fit dwelling place for God's redeemed and holy children. Then, the liberated earth and the liberated children of God will rejoice together (so to speak) in the Lord. (Isa. 65:17; Acts 3:21; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rev. 21:1-5)

In verses 22 and 23 Paul writes:

### **Romans 8:22-23**

With reference to the curse upon the earth, Paul envisages the whole natural creation agonising for delivery and release from pain. The creation yearns, as it were, for the day when God will bring forth a new beginning, and when it can rejoice in the new creation that God has made. This will take place, however, only when God renews and regenerates the earth—as he has promised. (2 Pet. 3:13)

Similarly, each child of God looks forward to the day when the Lord will deliver him or her from the pains and sorrows of this present earthly life. With joy, hope and patience, the believer waits eagerly for that time when the Lord will transform his earthly body to be like his glorious body. (2 Cor. 5:1-9)

The proof that the Lord will actually accomplish this is the fact that every one of his children is being indwelt, sealed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit. Therefore, although we groan inwardly for our final adoption as God's children, we remain firmly convinced—on the basis of God's unfailing Word—that we will indeed experience everything that God has promised us. This includes our final redemption or glorification. (Eph. 1:13-14) To this end, Paul writes in verse 24:



**Romans 8:24**

When God saved us through faith in Christ, he saved us in the hope—or absolute assurance—of eternal life. Christ's life, death and resurrection guarantees to everyone who belongs to Christ that person's complete justification in the sight of God, and also the gift of eternal life. Those, therefore, in whom God's Spirit dwells, have the assured hope that God will complete what he has begun in them by his Spirit; namely, their final redemption or glorification.

This is the hope laid up for us in glory. It is a hope that is unseen. It is a hope whose outcome we do not yet possess. Nevertheless, it is a hope that is absolutely sure of accomplishment in our lives. This is because God has given us this hope through faith in Christ and because it is founded on the Rock of Christ. It is also because God guarantees it to us by his Spirit and by his Word. That Word cannot fail; nor can the God, who cannot lie, ever prove unfaithful to his Word. (Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 1:3-9) Thus, in verse 25, the apostle writes:

**Romans 8:25**

While we groan inwardly, we suffer. Yet, we rejoice in our sufferings, for these sufferings produce perseverance, and perseverance produces patience and endurance. This in turn strengthens our character, and this strengthening of our character creates within us even greater hope and trust in God. (Rom. 5:1-5; 12:12; Heb. 10:36; 12:1-3; Jas. 1:3-4)

The more we trust in God, the more dependent we become on God. Thus, in all our trials and difficulties, we find that God is truly faithful. These and other fruits of God's Spirit strengthen our character in increasing measure. Thus, while we serve the Lord in our daily lives and continue to anticipate our final adoption with patience, we learn ever more to trust in God and to lean on his everlasting arms. Thus, too, we find that the Lord our God grants us grace to help from day to day, and fills us with hope in all the promises he has made to us through, and for the sake of, his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Holy Spirit Presents Our Prayers to God****Romans 8:26-27**

The believer groans expectantly as he anticipates eagerly the glory that lies ahead of him. Meanwhile, he is very much aware of the weakness and frailty of his present mortal body and earth-bound mind. He is aware of his inadequacies in expressing the inmost thoughts, desires and feelings of his heart to God in prayer. Yet, although the believer scarcely knows how to pray aright to God, the Holy Spirit is fully aware of these weaknesses in his life. God's Spirit is more than willing to help and support us in presenting our prayers, praises and petitions to our Father in heaven. To this end, Paul writes in verse 26:

**Romans 8:26**

We do not always know how we ought to pray aright. Again, we do not always know precisely what we should be praying for, or the nature of the requests we should be making to God. However, the Holy Spirit knows what is on our minds or in our hearts. Similarly, he knows when we are just not able to express our deepest thoughts and desires adequately or clearly enough in prayer.

God sees the thoughts and intents of our hearts. His Spirit intercedes with God on our behalf, interpreting and presenting our prayers to the Father, in line with God's will. The Holy Spirit does this with 'groans' (or with forms of expression) that no words of earth can equal

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or describe. This is because it is the divine and holy language of God the Spirit communicating with God the Son and God the Father on our behalf. In this way, the Spirit presents to God—in acceptable language—all our desires, prayers, petitions and praises. He does this even although we ourselves cannot find words to say exactly what may be in our hearts or minds. Thus, in verse 27, Paul writes:

### **Romans 8:27**

This confirms what we have said above. The Spirit of God searches the deepest recesses of our hearts or minds, collecting, collating and sanctifying every one of our prayers and petitions. (Cf. 1 Chron. 28:9) The Spirit then interprets them according to the will of God (thus we say, '*Your will be done*'). Acting as our Advocate or Intercessor, the Holy Spirit then presents these prayers, requests and praises to God the Father on our behalf. (Cf. Matt. 6:7-13)

The Bible assures us that—if we ask anything according to the will of God—he hears us. God's Word also assures us that we have received from him anything we have asked in this manner; i.e. anything that is in line with his express will and purposes. (Jer. 29:12-13; John 14:13-14; 1 John 3:21-22; 5:14-15)

Such answers, however, may assume many different forms. God may demonstrate an unreserved willingness to do exactly as we have asked. Alternatively, God's answer may reflect a modification of our exact request in order to conform to his purposes. Yet again, the Lord does not always reply to our requests immediately or in the short term. Frequently, God may delay his answers until a more appropriate time. This too accords with God's purposes. It also teaches us to trust God more, to exercise patience and to persevere in our faith. Yet, under all circumstances, God always responds faithfully to the prayers of his children—out of a loving, caring heart, and in full accordance with his will and purposes for them.

## **God is For Us!**

### **Romans 8:28-39**

God is Sovereign over all creation. He controls every event that takes place throughout the entire universe. This does not imply, however, that God is the author or originator of sin or of mankind's or Satan's evil deeds.

God exercises his sovereign dominion over his church world-wide and over each one of his redeemed children individually. Nothing can happen in their lives unless God permits it, and unless it accords with the Lord's eternal purposes. No one can harm God's children unless he allows it according to his own wise decrees. Even then, God maintains absolute control. Yet, whatever God permits to take place in the lives of his children, no one and nothing can succeed in separating them from his eternal love for them in Christ Jesus.

Thus, in verse 28 of Romans chapter 8, Paul writes these reassuring words to the beloved children of God:

### **Romans 8:28**

*We know, [says Paul], that in all things God works for the good of those who love him... (v.28a NIV).*

This is the believer's most certain assurance, for its foundation is the promises of God's holy and infallible Word and the work that Christ has accomplished for the believer through his life, death and resurrection. Because of what Christ has done to reconcile us to God, God is now able and willing to fulfil every promise that relates to the greater good

of his own children. Everything, therefore, that happens in our lives, happens according to God's plan and purposes, in order to achieve this ultimate good (cf. Gen. 50:20).

This may mean—and often does mean—that God permits difficulties, sufferings and trials to enter our lives, as well as peace, joy and happiness. God, however, introduces these trials to strengthen us and to bring about his intended purposes for us. Thus, we may rest absolutely assured that whatever happens to us, now or in the future, God is working his purposes out in and for our lives (Deut. 8:2-5; Rom. 5:3-5).

We love him because he first loved us. The one who loves us with an everlasting love will not fail to do all that he has promised for us in his Word (1 John 4:19).

But who are those whom the Lord loves with an everlasting love, and to whom do these promises apply? Who are those who love him with all their hearts because he gave his one and only Son to die for their sins at Calvary? Those only whom God has regenerated and adopted, and who belong to Christ. Those only whom God's Spirit has called to faith in Christ, and who are now indwelt, sealed and sanctified by that Spirit. God has elected these individuals from among every nation on earth, to call upon the name of the Lord. Thus they have received the salvation of the Lord and the gift of the Spirit. These—and these alone—are the ones whom God has called according to his purpose (v.28b; Rom. 1:6-7).

Paul expands on this theme by writing in verse 29:

#### **Romans 8:29**

Frequently, it is claimed that the word translated, 'foreknow' means simply 'to know beforehand'. This, however, is by no means the only meaning of the word, nor is it the meaning commonly attributed to it in the Bible. Again, this particular interpretation does not suit the immediate context, nor does it agree with other related passages of God's Word (*the analogy of Scripture*).

The word 'foreknow' means much more than 'to know beforehand'. Implicit in the meaning of the original word (to know, or to foreknow) is the idea of deliberately selecting or choosing in advance for a particular purpose. Thus, of Jeremiah the prophet, it is said that God 'knew' him before he was born; i.e. God *selected* or *chose* him in advance for appointment to divine service. (Jer. 1:5; cf. Rom. 11:2)

According to God's purposes, therefore, the Lord calls those whom he has already foreknown or selected beforehand; i.e. *from eternity*. Further to his plan and purposes, God predestines those whom he foreknows and subsequently calls. To predestine means 'to mark out' or 'set apart beforehand'. It means that God sovereignly elects certain individuals from among all nations to repent and believe on his Son. It means that he predestined those individuals to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, or to be transformed into his likeness through sanctification—ultimately culminating in glorification. (1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21)

God, therefore, has planned the believer's entire salvation and eternal destiny *from eternity past*. He brings this plan to fruition through the foreknowledge and pre-selection of these individuals; through their predestination to eternal life and conformity to his Son, and through other areas of his matchless grace toward undeserving sinners. (Eph. 1:4-5,11)

The latter part of verse 29 says that Christ is the firstborn among many brothers. The word translated 'firstborn' is another word that is often misinterpreted or misunderstood, simply because it does not always refer to the firstborn person in a family (primogeniture). The word can—and often does—relate to the firstborn in a family. However, on a number of occasions in the Word of God, the word 'firstborn' does not refer to primogeniture but to *priority of rank or status*, without any reference to *priority of birth*.

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For example, in the Psalms, David is said to be the firstborn, or the one who occupies a place of priority or supremacy. Thus, in Psalm 89 verse 27, God says concerning David:

*27 I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*  
(NIV)

Here, God appoints David as his 'firstborn'; i.e. he appoints him to a position of pre-eminence.

Thus too on a much greater scale with Christ. The eternal Son of God is 'firstborn' only in the sense that he occupies priority of rank or status, and absolute supremacy, over all of God's redeemed children. In this sense, then, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers. Christ was the first to rise from the dead never to die again. He is the firstborn from the dead. All resurrected believers follow after him.

In verse 30, the apostle Paul summarises and expands on what he has just written in the preceding two verses:

### **Romans 8:30**

Here we see a glimpse of God's glorious plan of redemption in action. From eternity, the sovereign God of all creation purposed to redeem an innumerable multitude of sinful men and women, boys and girls, and to reconcile them to himself as his own children. God effected this plan and purpose by sending his one and only Son into the world to atone for sin, and to redeem every single person whom he had set apart for himself from eternity—every one, that is, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10)

These are the ones whom God predestined or elected unto eternal salvation. These are the ones whom the Holy Spirit effectually called to faith in Christ, and whom the Spirit regenerated unto life eternal. These are the ones whom God has justified or declared righteous in his sight, and whom he will never again place under the sentence of condemnation. These are the ones whom God will glorify, or perfect in character and conduct, so that they can dwell in God's presence for ever. So certain is the believer's ultimate glorification that Paul speaks about it in the past tense—as though it had already taken place!

Paul continues his discussion by declaring in verse 31:

### **Romans 8:31**

In view of everything that God planned to do for us from eternity, how can we respond? — Only in love and adoration that the Most Holy, Majestic and Sovereign God should look upon hell-deserving sinners and decide to show such mercy to them. When we consider that God did not stop at showing mercy to us, but—in his grace—also adopted us as his own children, we ought to be overwhelmed with love, gratitude and devotion toward our Father in heaven, and toward Jesus Christ his Son.

Having planned our salvation from eternity, God also planned to protect us and to deliver us from evil. Though, often, we are attacked and tempted to sin, yet God upholds us with his everlasting arms. His Holy Spirit applies God's Word to repel the attacks of the evil one. God, therefore, is a shield about us, and with his Word, we shield ourselves from the enemy of our souls. God's Word is also our food to nourish and strengthen us, and to enable us to resist temptation to sin.

In these and many other ways, God is for us. But if God is for us, who can be against us? No one in heaven or earth can condemn us, because God himself has justified us by giving up his one and only Son for our redemption. Thus, in verse 32, the apostle Paul writes:

**Romans 8:32**

God so loved the world that he gave.... He gave all that love could give; he gave the one who was closest to his heart—his one and only Son; and he did this for us. (John 3:16-18) God did not spare his beloved Son from the humiliation and suffering that would be necessary to secure our redemption. Yet, although God gave up his one and only Son, the Son himself was fully willing to obey his Father and to act as our Redeemer. He volunteered to lay down his life for us.

Since God paid such a price to redeem us and to atone for our sins, how much more—now that he has reconciled and adopted us—will he be willing to bestow upon us all the riches of his grace, and all his love toward us? If it accords with God's will, there is nothing that he will not do for us, for the sake of his honour and glory. (Rom. 5:6-10)

In verse 33, the apostle continues by asking:

**Romans 8:33**

By his own sovereign will, God chose to exercise mercy toward sinners, all of whom deserved only his righteous wrath and condemnation. Yet, God loved them and chose them for himself. He gave his own Son to pay the penalty for their sin, thus releasing them from condemnation and judgment. God therefore justifies the ungodly by his grace. Who, then, will presume to accuse or condemn those whom God has justified?

Granted, Satan brings all manner of accusations—true and false—against the saints of God. But God finds no fault with them, for Christ has already paid sin's penalty and set them free. Thus Satan's malicious accusations cannot stand, and God dismisses every one of them from before his throne. Even now, in fact, Christ Jesus intercedes for his people on the basis of his finished and perfect work on earth.

In addition, no one can bring any valid charge against those whom God has chosen, because in Christ Jesus, God has forgiven them and made them eternally secure. Therefore, God will not permit any charges against them to stand. (Isa. 54:17)

Even when our own conscience convicts and accuses us, and we condemn ourselves, we have an Advocate with the Father. Whenever we confess our sins to God, he forgives us because of what his Son has already done for us at Calvary, and by his resurrection. We are, therefore, totally surrounded and protected by the love of God. He has justified us, and he will never permit anyone to condemn us.

In verse 34, Paul continues by asking:

**Romans 8:34**

Who is able to accuse or condemn? Who will dare to accuse or condemn those whom God has justified? Christ died for our offences. He died to atone for our sins; and by that perfect sacrifice, God is pleased to forgive and justify repentant and believing sinners.

Again, God has reckoned the perfect righteousness of his own Son to the believing sinner's account. Therefore, God now sees each truly regenerated believer as clothed with Christ's righteousness. Who, then, will or can condemn? Christ has risen! Christ is now exalted to the right hand of his Father—that place of supreme power, dominion and authority over all creation. There, in the presence of his Father, the Lord Jesus intercedes for each of his redeemed people. There, he pleads our cause on the merits of his perfect life and his completed work of atonement. (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2)

Who, then, can condemn? As Paul declared in verse 1 of this chapter, '*...There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*' (Rom. 8:1). People may try to find fault,

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to accuse or to condemn the children of God. However, the one who exercises sovereign dominion over the universe and over our lives, guards us from all false accusation and acquits us from all guilt.

The now risen and glorified Lord Jesus bore the penalty for our sin and carried all our guilt to the tree. He will not, therefore, permit any creature in heaven or on earth to accuse us for the sins he has already forgiven. Whether we committed these sins in the past, or commit them in the present or the future, all have been accounted for and paid for at Calvary. This, of course, does not provide any believer with a licence to sin. A consistently sinful life, and holiness of life, are mutually exclusive forms of conduct.

Christ demonstrated the extent of his love for us by dying for us while we were still sinners. Thus, in verses 35 and 36, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 8:35-36**

{Cf. Psalm 44:22}

Christ demonstrated the extent of his love for us by coming into the world to live and die for us while we were still laden with sin and guilt. If the holy Son of God loved us while we were still sinners, how much more must he love us now that he has redeemed us and cleansed us from all sin? (Rom. 5:7-8)

And who or what can separate us from that measureless love? No one and nothing can separate us from Christ's love. No person in all creation can separate us from Christ's love for us, nor can any circumstances affecting our lives separate us from that everlasting love. We may experience much trouble, sorrow or grief in our lives, but Christ's love for us will remain the same and he will deliver us in our time of trouble. We may endure much hardship, but the matchless love of Christ will sustain us and meet our every need. We may be called upon to endure persecution for the sake and name of Christ, but the knowledge of his love in our hearts will strengthen us and encourage us and cause us to stand.

Again, we may lack basic necessities or even endure extreme shortage or famine, but out of his intense love for us we know the Lord will take care of our souls. We may endure shortage of clothing or be deprived of bodily protection, but the love of Christ will not forsake us but will find a way to meet our most immediate needs. At times, we may be exposed to great danger or hazard, but Christ will love us still and he will never leave us in our time of greatest need. We may be exposed to the sword (war, or conflict of arms), but Christ's love and Christ's peace will arm and strengthen us for the fight.

In many ways, then, we may face death daily. By many people, we may be considered as sheep to be slaughtered. But if we suffer, we suffer for Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. He has set us an example of love, suffering, patience and humility. By his grace and by the Spirit's enabling power, we must endeavour to follow in his steps. (Eph. 5:1-2) Whatever difficulties, sorrows and hardships we face in this world, Paul is convinced that—through Christ's love for us—we shall overcome. Thus, in verse 37, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 8:37**

Left to our own devices, we could not hope to stand against every overwhelming difficulty in this life. More likely than not, adverse circumstances would eventually wear us down, weaken our resolve or our faith, and possibly tend to lead us into despondency, depression or even despair.

When, however, we are aware of just how deeply and intensely Christ loves us, we realise that our hope, strength and faith comes to us through him. The more we realise that Christ will never take his love away from us, the more we become convinced that he will fully equip us for every adversity. And if he so equips us in his love, then he will surely deliver us from or through every trial and difficulty in our lives. Thus, ultimately, we learn to conquer or overcome difficulties or trials. We cannot do so, however, in our own strength, but only by the grace and in the strength of the Lord, and through the assured knowledge of his love for us.

Paul himself suffered many hardships in his service for Christ—including severe hunger, beatings, shipwrecks and imprisonments. Nevertheless, the apostle remained utterly convinced that nothing in all creation can overcome us or separate us from Christ's love. Thus, in verses 38 and 39, Paul pens these reassuring words:

### **Romans 8:38-39**

Paul—and every other believer—can be utterly convinced of the permanency of Christ's love. Why? Because this love is founded in the Father's love for the world, and also in his love for his own Son. This love is founded too in Christ's personal love for each one of those whom the Father has given him. Again, Christ's love is founded in the work he accomplished on our behalf.

Essentially, this love is founded in God's eternal plan of redemption, and it derives from the Father and the Son's personal attributes. Therefore, we can remain absolutely assured that this love will never end and it will never fail. Rather, the love of God will endure forever.

Thus, in verse 38, the apostle is able to say that neither death nor life can separate us from this love. Death admits the believer into the immediate and loving presence of God and of his Son, where we will experience their love at first hand throughout the eternal ages. Meanwhile, life in Christ and with Christ in this world guarantees that we will experience his love with us, in us, and for us at all times. Even when we are most conscious of our sins and unworthiness, yet his love for us will never change—no matter how we feel.

In the same verse, Paul says that neither angels nor demons [NIV mg., *heavenly rulers*] can separate us from this love. No powers or authorities in the heavenly realms—whether good or evil—have the ability to separate us from Christ or from his love for us. Every one of these superhuman beings remains subject to Christ's sovereign dominion over them. Consequently, though powerful in themselves, they are completely powerless to interfere in any way with the plan or purposes of God for his redeemed people, or with the eternal love he has for them. (1 Pet. 3:22)

Next Paul declares that circumstances are totally unable to separate us from Christ's love. Nothing that happens in the present, or that will happen in the future, can or will be able to change Christ's everlasting love for his own redeemed people. Christ himself controls the present—and everything that happens throughout the universe—for the ultimate good of his church in general and for each believer in particular. The same Lord Jesus will also shape and control every future circumstance and event in accordance with the eternal plans and purposes of God. Thus, both present and future remain inexorably under the control of the Almighty God and of his Son.

At the end of verse 38, Paul declares that 'powers' cannot separate us from this love. The apostle has already mentioned the heavenly powers or rulers in the form of angels (good and evil). Here, Paul may be thinking about earthly powers and authorities. Whatever forms those powers or authorities assume—whether good or bad—they cannot separate us from Christ's eternal love for us. Of this we can be utterly convinced.

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The powers or authorities that exist have been established by God (Rom. 13:1). God sets up and deposes rulers according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, and in fulfillment of his own plans and purposes for nations and for individuals (Dan. 2:21). Each one of us is subject to the earthly rulers whom God appoints. However, every one of these earthly rulers remains subject to, and wholly accountable to, God himself.

In verse 39, the apostle Paul adds that neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus. This simply means that nothing and no one in the entire universe is able—or will be able—to come between us and Christ's boundless love for his redeemed and holy people.

It may be worth noting here the distinction between the latter part of verse 39 and verse 35. In verse 35, Paul speaks of the love of Christ for us. Here, in verse 39, the apostle speaks of the love of God for us as exhibited through his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we see that both Father and Son unite in demonstrating their boundless and eternal love to us. Both unite in shedding that love abroad in our hearts through the power and personal presence of the Holy Spirit whom they have imparted to us as a pledge and guarantee of our final salvation.



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## Romans Chapter 9

### God Chooses Whom He Will

#### **Romans 9:1-18**

We come now to chapter 9 of Romans. In this and the following two chapters, the apostle Paul turns his attention to the people of Israel insofar as God's promises and plan of redemption relates to them. As a whole, Israel had rejected God's promised Messiah—the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, the nation had cut itself off from God and from his many blessings—both spiritual and temporal. God's plans and intentions for Israel had not thereby been frustrated, however. From eternity, God knew that Israel would pursue a course of unbelief and disobedience.

Although, as a whole, the nation of Israel has rejected Christ—and therefore been rejected by God—this rejection is neither final nor total. By God's grace, a small proportion of Jewish people has believed God's Word, and has turned to Christ for salvation. This 'remnant' chosen by God's grace has embraced Christ by faith, and has believed upon him as God's promised Messiah—the Messiah of the OT Scriptures. Thus, on the part of Israel, the rejection of Christ has not been total.

Again, by the grace and providence of God, many more Jewish people will yet repent and turn to Christ in faith. Then, perhaps virtually the entire nation of Israel living at that time will call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. At that time, God's Holy Spirit will take away the veil presently covering their minds. Then, freely and willingly, Israel will acknowledge that the Lord Jesus is indeed God's promised Messiah. Thus, Israel's present rejection of Christ is not final. At some future date, God's Spirit will convict Israel and will draw them to Christ—possibly on a very large scale. We will look at these matters more fully during our study of the next few chapters.

At the time Paul wrote this letter to the believers at Rome, however, Israel as a whole remained very much alienated from God, and from his love, mercy and grace. Of course, there were many notable exceptions to this. Many of the early believers came from Jewish backgrounds, as did Paul himself. However, the greater part of the Jewish nation—and especially the religious leadership—remained antagonistic to the Christian faith.

Being from a Jewish background himself, the apostle Paul felt intense sorrow and grief over his fellow countrymen's wilful unbelief and their rejection of Christ as their Messiah. Paul knew that—by their disobedience and rebellion—they were placing themselves under the wrath and curse of God, and this grieved the apostle very deeply. Paul loved his brothers and sisters of his own race, as these chapters clearly indicate. But he knew also that, by their rejection of the Messiah, they had also forfeited God's intended blessings for them. Thus, in the opening verses of chapter 9, the apostle begins by declaring:

#### **Romans 9:1-2**

Paul wants to make absolutely plain to the Christians at Rome the depth of his sincerity and anguish of heart for his fellow countrymen—the people of Israel. Although the apostle was no longer practising the Jewish religion as such, he was very familiar with it and he knew all of God's promises attached to it through faith and obedience. However, he had witnessed only unbelief and disobedience among his own people in regard to God's Word and God's promises. Thus, the apostle grieves very deeply over Israel's waywardness and their refusal to believe that God's Son is indeed their promised Messiah.

In expressing his deep feelings for his brothers and sisters according to the flesh, the apostle asserts positively that he is speaking the truth in Christ. That is, he is speaking with Christ as his witness to the truthfulness of what he says, or as one who belongs to Christ and who is being totally honest and sincere (cf. Ch. 1:9; Gal. 1:20). Added to the apostle's words are his internal convictions. Here, the Holy Spirit heightens Paul's own awareness and concern for Israel's condition and plight in the sight of God. This causes the apostle to sorrow and grieve over Israel even more.

In verse 2, the apostle declared that he had great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart. (See also Ch. 10:1) Paul's love for his nation must have been very great, for his anguish of heart was certainly sincere and keenly felt. Yet, Paul had suffered so much at the hands of his own people—just as the Lord Jesus had done before him. Even so, the apostle harboured no bitterness or resentment against his fellow countrymen. Rather, like Christ, he was willing—yes, more than willing—to forgive. Paul considers that they—like him before his conversion—were acting in ignorance and unbelief. However, just as God had showed mercy to Paul—this former zealous and bigoted Pharisee—so it was possible that God, in his grace, could show mercy to other members of the Israelite race (1 Tim. 1:13).

Yet, so ardent is Paul's desire for the repentance and salvation of Israel that, in verses 3 to 4a, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 9:3-4a**

Paul's yearning for the salvation of his fellow Jews is so intense that he even wishes it were possible for him to be placed under God's curse and separated from Christ, if that would mean the salvation of the Jews. It would, of course, have been impossible for Paul either to have been cut off from Christ (to whom God unites the believer eternally), or to somehow substitute or sacrifice his life for that of his fellow countrymen. However, by saying that he was willing to do this, and to be placed under the divine curse, demonstrates the strength of the apostle's emotions for those of his own race (cf. Exodus 32:32)

When Paul wishes that he himself might be cursed, the word translated 'cursed' is the word 'anathema'. In the Bible—and in the OT especially—something that was declared to be 'anathema' or accursed was something that had been devoted entirely to God for its destruction. Hence, because of their persistent sin and wickedness, certain individuals and nations were declared anathema to God: That is, God commanded that they be devoted entirely to him for their just destruction. (Jos. 6:17-18)

In the NT too, Paul uses this word elsewhere in his letters. For example, in his letter to the Galatians, the apostle declares that anyone—even an angel from heaven—that preaches a different gospel, comes under the curse of eternal condemnation (lit. *anathema*). That person is devoted to God for his ultimate destruction, unless he repents and renounces his wickedness in distorting the Word of Truth or the way of salvation. (Gal. 1:8-9 Gk. text)

The apostle Paul's concern for those of his own nation is so great that he is willing even to be placed under such a dreadful curse, if it would somehow result in Israel's repentance and salvation. Paul, of course, is not implying that this intense desire could ever become a reality, but it is an earnest expression of the inmost longings of his heart for the people of Israel—his fellow Jews.

We must bear in mind that, originally, God set apart the nation of Israel for himself as his own special and sanctified people. The Lord chose them and set his love upon them, even although they had done nothing to deserve his love. He chose them, too, even although they were the fewest of all peoples. (Deut. 7:6-8) While Israel remained faithful to God, the Lord continued to bless them and to lead them in the good and right way. However, when Israel rebelled against God and disobeyed his word, the Lord disciplined them.

Yet, because of his promises to the patriarchs and because of his everlasting love for them, God never forsook them utterly.

So it is was in Paul's day and so it remains at the present time. Due to Israel's unbelief and rejection of God's Son, God has set the nation aside—but not totally and not finally. One day, God will restore his people, and cause them to call upon the name of his Son for their salvation. This, however, will be dealt with later in these chapters (Ch. 11:1-2).

#### **Romans 9:4b**

Returning now to the next part of verse 4, Paul recounts some of the many blessings and privileges God bestowed upon Israel in earlier days. '*Theirs*,' says the apostle, '*is the adoption as sons...*' God called Abram (i.e., Abraham) and set apart Abraham and his offspring for himself. The Lord declared that they were to be known as his sons and daughters (Cf. Gen. 17:8)

This adoption of Abraham and his descendants by God was a unique blessing and privilege, for no other nation on earth could address the Lord God as their Father in heaven. This right was reserved only for those whom God had adopted by his grace. Originally, this was Abraham, together with all his descendants who exercised a like faith in God. Since the coming of Christ, it has included everyone who has accepted Christ by faith, and who has been indwelt by his Holy Spirit.

Paul then says of the nation of Israel that theirs was the divine glory. They—unlike any other nation on earth—experienced the power and personal presence among them of the LORD God Almighty (El Shaddai). Wherever God's people went, the glory of the LORD accompanied them, or led them in the way that they should go (Exodus 16:10; 24:15-17; 40:34-38; see also Deut. 1:32-33).

Paul then mentions the covenants or solemn, sacred and irrevocable promises of God. There are a number of covenants in the Bible, including the one made to Abraham to bless him and to make of his descendants a great nation and as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5,18-21; 17:5-7,10-21)

God's covenants also included his promise to send the Redeemer or Deliverer (the Messiah) through the offspring, firstly of Adam and Eve and later of Abraham and Sarah. Once more, no other nation on earth ever received such promises as those God gave to Abraham and his descendants. These covenant blessings were peculiar to God's people, Israel (Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5)

From the covenants or promises of grace, Paul moves on to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Again, only Israel received the very words of God engraved by his finger on tablets of stone, and delivered to them by his servant Moses. Here, God had set down his most holy standards of behaviour for his chosen people. By this law, the people became much more aware of their sin and sinfulness, and of the majestic holiness of God. (Exodus 19:3-9; 20:1-20; 31:18)

Yet, although the law was a privilege, it could not deliver from sin. Rather, because of its perfection, it could only identify sin and condemn the sinner. Yet, by pointing out his sinfulness and exposing his helplessness, the purpose of the law was to drive sinners to God for mercy and forgiveness. Even then, by his sovereign grace, God had provided a way of atonement through the shedding of blood; for only by the shedding of blood could there be a remission of sins. (Heb. 9:22)

Next in verse 4, Paul mentions the temple worship. Only among the Jews did the LORD God make known his holy Name, and only in the temple were the people authorised to make due sacrifices of worship and praise to God. No other form or place of worship was acceptable to the LORD of all the earth, except in that place where he had caused his

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name to be remembered; i.e. in the temple at Jerusalem. Jerusalem replaced the temporary places of worship such as the tent or tabernacle in the desert. (Exodus 12:25-27; 2 Chron. 6:4-11)

All God's promises of blessing to his people—and through his people, to the world—came through the Jews. God's ultimate gift and blessing to his people and to world was himself a Jew, according to his human ancestry. (John 4:22) Thus, in verse 5, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 9:5**

To Israel, too, belong the patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (or Israel). God chose each of these individuals. In his providence and grace, the LORD blessed each of them and their families for their faithfulness to him, and for their belief in his covenant promises. (Deut. 10:15; Rom. 11:28-29)

This does not imply that these individuals were faultless in the sight of God. At times, they sinned as any child of God can sin. God, however, in his mercy forgave them. Overall however, their faith in God and their faithfulness to God brought upon them the blessings of God. The greatest of these blessings was the gift of God's Son. In regard to his human ancestry, the Lord Jesus Christ was a direct descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Thus, Christ fulfilled the prophecies concerning his descent from Abraham and his chosen offspring.

Paul, however, does not wish to imply that Christ originated only from the line of Abraham—however great a privilege that might have been to the Jews. Thus, the apostle writes in verse 5:

*...and from them [Israel] is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen. (NIV)*

This statement is an unambiguous assertion of Christ's deity—and for this reason, a number of individuals have attempted to emend this text. Taken as it stands, however, this verse makes it abundantly plain that the holy Son of God did not derive his origin through Abraham, or even through Adam—except insofar as his human nature was concerned. The Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God. As such, he had no beginning of days, just as he will have no end of years. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, and the Ever Living One. Christ is God. He is God over all, for ever praised! Amen. (Ps. 45:6-7; Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2; John 1:1-3; 10:30; Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 1:3,8-13; Rev. 1:18; 22:13)

(As we have mentioned, a number of individuals have attempted to reconstruct the above text to avoid saying that Jesus Christ is God (See, for example, the marginal renderings in this version). However, this involves an unnatural and unwarranted alteration to the grammar of the text. Such a change cannot be justified when it is abundantly clear that Paul, John and other sacred writers made very similar assertions of Christ's deity elsewhere in the Word of God. These other passages clearly support the translation and interpretation given above. Again, all of these sacred writers were speaking by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. Because, therefore, they were inspired by the Spirit of God, they could not err in what they taught or wrote.)

Such, then, were some of the very many blessings and privileges that God bestowed upon the nation of Israel. But, if this was so, why did they reject God's Son—the greatest gift and blessing of all? Why did Israel refuse to believe the prophets and other faithful servants of God who foretold the sufferings of the coming Messiah? Why did they turn away from God's pure and holy Word in favour of their own traditions and man-made rules and regulations?

Paul begins to answer these questions in verse 6. There, the apostle assures us:

### **Romans 9:6**

God's Word cannot fail, nor can any promise that God has made fail to be fulfilled. (Num. 23:19; Isa. 55:10-11) Far from God's Word failing in regard to Israel, that Word plainly foretold Israel's rejection of their Messiah (Isa. 53:1-3). Thus, God's Word was fulfilled when—in unbelief and disobedience—Israel despised and rejected the Son of God. (Rom. 10:16-21) Even so, God's purposes for the salvation of Israel remain unaffected by the nation's present unbelief. In due time, God will yet accomplish his plan for Israel—in accordance with his covenant promises and eternal purposes. (Rom. 11:1-5)

We should observe, however, that not everyone who calls himself an Israelite is a true descendant of Israel. Abraham had two sons—Ishmael and Isaac. Only Isaac, however, was born as a result of God's promise to Abraham. Therefore, only Isaac was the son to whom God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants legitimately applied (Gen. 21:12; cf. Rom. 2:28-29).

God did bestow a particular blessing upon Ishmael, promising to produce nations and rulers from his descendants. Hence, from Ishmael, derives the Arab nations. (Gen. 21:13,18; 17:20) God's sovereign choice, however, lay in Isaac—the son whom God had promised, and who was born to Abraham and Sarah even in their old age.

It was through Isaac—and Isaac alone—that God's promise of blessing on Israel would be found. Again, through Isaac and his descendants alone God purposed to send his Son, the Messiah, into the world. Thus, those who are the true children of Israel are those who are associated with God's choice and God's promises—as was Isaac. This is confirmed in verse 7 where Paul writes:

### **Romans 9:7**

{Cf. Gen. 21:12}

Many of the Jews believed that biological descent from their forefather Abraham guaranteed their acceptance by God and inclusion in the covenants of God. They asserted that God made his covenant promise with Abraham and with all Abraham's offspring; i.e. to all who submitted to the rite of circumcision. (John 8:33,39; see also Gal. 3:6-7,9) God had given this rite to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between himself and the patriarch. The LORD had commanded Abraham—and after him, his descendants—to circumcise every male member of their households in remembrance of this covenant God had made with Abraham. The Jews thus believed that every descendant of Abraham, *who had been circumcised*, was God's child. (Gen. 17:1-14)

Unfortunately, however, they failed to realise that God did not make his covenant promise with every one of Abraham's biological descendants, but only with those who were the descendants of Abraham's son Isaac. The sons of Ishmael also submitted to circumcision, but this did not mean that God extended his covenant of grace and redemption to that people. At this time in the history of the world, God's purposes of grace and redemption were to be fulfilled only through the line of Isaac. (Gen. 17:20-21)

Again, God's promise of blessing on his people was conditional on their faith in him. Long before the coming of Christ, however, the Jews had turned away from the true and living God—although they still claimed (outward) allegiance to him through their biological connection with Abraham. Instead of living by faith, however, they followed rules, regulations and traditions of men. For the most part, however, the Jews did not honour God or follow a godly life.

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This, of course, was not true of the entire nation of Israel (here, inclusive of Judah). A number of individual Jews and Jewish families remained faithful to God and worshipped him with all their hearts. They believed the OT Scriptures, and they believed that God would come to them in power through the Messiah. Some of these faithful Jewish believers even lived to witness the birth of Christ, and they rejoiced when they realised that they had seen the LORD's Christ. (Luke 1:46-49; 2:25-38)

Such Jews as these constituted the true children of Abraham. They were not only the descendants of Abraham and Isaac, but they also firmly believed God's Word and remained faithful to the Lord. This was an example of the 'remnant' chosen and saved by grace.

In verse 8, the apostle rephrases this topic:

### Romans 9:8

At this point, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of the circumstances under which God made his covenant promises to Abraham: That is, God's promise to bless Abraham and to make of him a great nation through whom the LORD would bless all nations on earth. At the time God made this promise to Abraham, he and Sarah were childless. Therefore, there was no one through whom God could fulfil his promises to Abraham. Yet, Abraham believed God, and the LORD counted his faith to him as righteousness. (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6)

Even after a number of years had passed, however, Abraham and his wife remained childless. At this point, Abraham's wife Sarah suggested that he father a child through their handmaid Hagar. Unwisely, Abraham agreed to this, and thus Ishmael was born. We should note that Ishmael was born through natural biological processes alone. Ishmael, however, was not the son God had promised to Abraham. (Gen. 16:1-4)

As the years passed, both Abraham and Sarah grew very old and were no longer able to have children. By this time, Abraham was now almost 100 years old while Sarah was about ninety. This, however, was exactly the time when God had intended to fulfil his promise of a son to Abraham—i.e. when, humanly speaking, conception or childbirth was impossible. Thus, at this point, the LORD renewed his promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah, and in due course Isaac was born. (Gen. 17:1-2,17)

We should note here that Isaac was born through natural biological processes only because God had intervened directly to restore these reproductive faculties to Abraham and Sarah. In this way, God demonstrated his power and his ability to fulfil his promises, even when—humanly speaking—this seemed impossible. (Gal. 4:22-23) Thus, in verse 8, Paul was able to write:

*“...it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.” (NIV)*

This concept is confirmed in verse 9, where the apostle writes:

### Romans 9:9

{Cf. Gen. 18:10,14}

Because of their now advanced years, Abraham and Sarah had begun to wonder if God would be able to keep his promise to give them a son. Thus, to strengthen them in the faith, God appeared to them again and renewed his promise to them. He assured them that—by the following year—Sarah would indeed have a son. (Gen. 18:10) At first, Sarah laughed at this prospect. However, she soon came to realise that—to the omnipotent and



faithful God—nothing can be impossible. In accordance with God's word, Isaac was born to Sarah the following year. (Gen. 18:11-14; 21:1-7)

Once more, the Lord had proved his power, glory and faithfulness; even although his people had not fully trusted in his promise. Now that Isaac was born, God's purposes for Abraham's offspring could begin to take shape. (Heb. 11:11-12)

God's choice and God's purposes for his own people were to be fulfilled through Isaac and his offspring, not through any other of Abraham's children. It may be objected, of course, that this was only just and right since only Isaac derived his parentage from both Abraham and Sarah. However, God's sovereign choice of Isaac cannot so readily be explained or dismissed. The apostle Paul anticipates this kind of objection, therefore in verse 10 he writes:

### **Romans 9:10**

In this instance, no argument can be raised against the parentage of Isaac and Rebekah's twin boys. Isaac and Rebekah were the natural and legitimate parents of these two children, Jacob and Esau. (Gen. 25:20-24) Having, therefore, established this point, Paul continues in verses 11 and 12:

### **Romans 9:11-12**

{Cf. Gen. 25:23}

Here, it becomes unmistakably clear that God chooses whom he wills. Verse 11 tells us as much. There, it is revealed that the twins had not yet been born. Therefore, they could not have done anything good or bad. They could not have done anything either to merit God's approval or disapproval.

God, however, had already determined that the older or firstborn of the twins should serve the younger. Through the younger son—rather than the older or firstborn—God would fulfil his purposes in election for the blessing of the nation, and ultimately of the world. Thus, before the twins were born, God said to Rebekah, "*The older will serve the younger*" (Gen. 25:23).

This did not only apply to the twins, Jacob and Esau, themselves, but also and more generally to their respective offspring. God did all this so that his eternal purposes in election might stand. As we can see, this election is not based on anything good or bad in the individuals chosen, but on the sovereign choice and purpose of God, and according to his sovereign grace (cf. Rom. 11:5-7; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Thus, Paul remarks in verse 13:

### **Romans 9:13**

{Cf. Mal. 1:2,3}

Here, it is apparent that verse 11 and 12 were not referring merely to Jacob (or Israel) and Esau as individuals, but also to their respective offspring. This becomes clear from the context of the passage quoted by Paul in verse 13. This quotation is from Malachi chapter 1 where the prophet is speaking about the people of Jacob (i.e. Israel) and the people of Esau (i.e. Edom) (Mal. 1:1-4).

In his divine providence and grace—and according to his purposes in election—God chose Jacob (or Israel) and set them apart as a holy people; a people for himself. This special people took precedence over Esau and his descendants, as well as over every

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other nation on earth. Thus, in fulfilment of God's word, the older or firstborn brother's descendants (i.e. the descendants of Esau) became subservient or yielded priority to the descendants of the younger brother (Jacob or Israel) (cf. 2 Sam. 8:14)

In the verse quoted by Paul above, the Lord says, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*" (v.13). This expression is not to be understood in absolute terms, but in relative terms. Granted, Israel was the people God had chosen and through whom he would bless the world. However, to a lesser extent, the descendants of Esau too experienced many of God's blessings—although not those given exclusively to his own people.

The expression, "...*Esau I hated*," is very similar to the expression used by the Lord Jesus when he said that his disciples must be prepared to hate their own father and mother in order to follow him. (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26) At no time, however, does God encourage—let alone command—people to hate their father or mother in the commonly understood sense of this term. On the contrary, God explicitly commands that we honour our father and our mother. (Exodus 20:12)

Thus when Jesus used this expression, he was saying that allegiance to him and to his cause must take precedence over every other obligation in our lives—even over that which we rightfully owe to our own parents. This, however, was merely expressing a matter of priority, not of actually or virtually repudiating our responsibility toward our parents. Indeed, Paul himself expressly teaches elsewhere that we must honour our parents. (Eph. 3:1-3; Col. 3:20)

Thus, when God says that he loves Jacob but hates Esau, it means that he has set his special electing love, mercy and grace on Jacob (or Israel). However, by his own sovereign will, the Lord God has excluded Esau from the privileges of that election.

We must always remember that everyone without exception is a sinner deserving only God's wrath and condemnation. This applied as much to Israel as to anyone else. Election is purely a matter of God's sovereign will and choice—not of merit or worthiness in the person chosen. Therefore, it would be perfectly just on God's part to allow everyone to perish in his or her sins—for this is the just penalty for sin. In his love, however, God chooses to show mercy on whom he wills to show mercy.

Paul, however, anticipates an objection to these remarks concerning God's right of sovereignty. Thus, in verses 14 and 15, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 9:14,15**

{Cf. Exodus 33:19}

It might be imagined that God is unjust when he sovereignly chooses certain individuals, or a certain nation. God, however, can never act unjustly, nor can he do anything that is inconsistent with his perfect, holy and righteous character (Deut. 32:4; Job 34:10-12). In everything relating to mankind, God always acts justly. There are very good reasons for everything he does and for every choice that he makes. Above all, God's decisions and actions bring glory and honour to his holy and majestic name (cf. Rev. 15:3-4).

We may not fully understand the reasons for God's decisions or actions in divine election or in other demonstrations of his sovereign choice or power. Essentially, this is because God has endowed us with only limited faculties and abilities. Again, we must remember that we are sinful human beings. Thus, all our faculties or abilities have been marred or distorted to some extent by the polluting effects of our sinful nature. (Isa. 64:6)

Considering therefore the finite nature of our constitution and the effects of sin on our hearts or minds, we are not in a position to sit in judgment upon the most holy, righteous and wise God. In our finite and sinful condition, we are totally unqualified and unfit to de-

clare that God is unjust when he exercises his sovereign power or sovereign choice. (Isa. 45:9-11; cf. Jer. 18:1-11).

In verse 15, Paul cites an example of God's declared right of sovereignty. In that verse, the LORD said to Moses,

*... "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." {Exodus 33:19 NIV}*

Paul appears to be quoting this verse from Exodus chapter 33. There, Moses had requested to see the LORD's glory. However, in verse 19 of Exodus chapter 33, it is written:

*19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live." (NIV; See also vv.21-23)*

Here, God was revealing to Moses that one of his divine characteristics or an attribute of his glory was his right to exercise mercy and compassion on whom he willed. No one deserved God's mercy, for all have sinned and come short of his glory. This was particularly true of Israel just before Moses asked to see the LORD's glory. For, when Moses had come down from Mount Sinai on the first occasion, he found the people worshipping the golden calf, and indulging in pagan revelry and gross sexual immorality. (Exodus 32:1-28; 1 Cor. 10:8)

In his holiness, justice and righteousness, God could have destroyed the people of Israel. For they were committing this grievous evil at the very time God was transmitting his holy commandments to Moses on the mount. Yet, in his love, mercy and grace God judged only those primarily responsible for this great wickedness. The LORD spared the remainder of the nation. (Exodus 32:10,14,19-20,25-28,30-35; 34:6-7)

God, however, retains the absolute right to exercise judgment, or to exercise mercy and compassion on whom he will. However, as can be seen from the foregoing example, those whom God judges are those who deserve God's judgment and condemnation.

Taking the above example again, had God acted in righteousness and justice alone (without regard to his mercy and compassion), then every one of the people of Israel who were involved in this sin would have been judged by God—as were the ringleaders. This condemnation, however, would have been justly deserved. God's glory would still have been enhanced, because—instead of passing by sin and iniquity—the LORD would have been punishing these people, as their sins deserved. Such punishment would have been in accordance with God's holy and righteous character.

God cannot look on evil, nor can he acquit the guilty. To do so, would be unrighteousness in God (Hab. 1:13; Nahum 1:3). Thus, when God does decide to exercise his prerogative of mercy and compassion on whom he will, he maintains his just, righteous and holy character. In order to do this, however—and in order to satisfy the demands of his holy law—God provides a perfect substitute to take the sinner's place and to bear the penalty due to the sinner.

In verse 16, the apostle continues:

### **Romans 9:16**

The Word of God is unequivocal: In line with his sovereign will and purposes, God elects whom he will. Man's desire or efforts do not enter into God's choice, neither does God's foreknowledge of man's actions in any way affect or influence God's choice. Regardless

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of what a person may or may not do in the future, God may decide to elect that person in order to fulfil his own purposes and glorify his holy name. This was the case with Abraham. Of all the people living in Mesopotamia, God chose one man (Abram), told him to leave his native land, and promised to make of him a great nation. (Gen. 12:1-3)

Similarly, God's plans were fulfilled through his election or sovereign choice of Isaac and not through any of Abraham's other children. Yet again, when the twins Jacob and Esau were born, God had already chosen the younger brother Jacob as the one through whom the next step in his plans would be fulfilled. (Gen. 21:12; see also Rom. 9:6-8)

In each of these cases, God's choice was both sovereign and unmerited. So it is in every case involving election to salvation and eternal life. No one deserves to be chosen, or to be included in God's purposes for the redemption of sinners. In his love and mercy, however, God extends the hand of mercy to whom he will. (2 Thess. 2:13-14)

However, no amount of effort, will, desire, good intentions, good works or anything else on the part of sinful men and women can influence whom God chooses to eternal salvation. Nor can any of these things influence whom God leaves to the just punishment of their sin. (Titus 3:3-7; Jas. 1:18) Thus, as verse 16 says,

*It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.*  
(NIV)

God not only exercises sovereignty over ordinary individuals, but also over world rulers or those appointed to high office. Paul cites an example of this in verse 17:

### Romans 9:17

{Cf. Exodus 9:16}

The phrase, *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh*, means that this was the word of the LORD God Almighty to the Pharaoh, or the ruler of Egypt. God's servant Moses spoke this word to the Pharaoh on numerous occasions when God commanded the Egyptian ruler to release his people from slavery. (Exodus 9:13-16)

God appoints and deposes world rulers, as he sees fit. God appointed the Pharaoh or raised him up and caused him to stand until he had fulfilled his purposes for his chosen people. The Pharaoh, for his part, had stubbornly and evilly maltreated God's people, and had wilfully refused to heed God's commands concerning his enslaved people. The Pharaoh, however, could not thwart nor hinder God's eternal purposes, nor could he ultimately prevent God from delivering the Hebrew people from his hands. However, by his wilful disobedience to the word of the LORD—in spite of the repeated demonstrations of God's sovereign power over nature—the Pharaoh hardened his heart against the LORD. He refused yet again to let God's people go.

God did not appoint or establish the Pharaoh as an evil ruler. Rather, by his own sinful attitudes and actions, the Pharaoh of Egypt *became* an evil ruler. Thus, he merited God's punishment on himself and on his land. When the Pharaoh hardened his heart repeatedly against the LORD, God eventually hardened the Pharaoh's heart. Thus, he was no longer capable of responding favourably to, or obeying, God's voice—even if he had wanted to. This was part of the Pharaoh's deserved punishment. When the LORD judged the Pharaoh for his evil heart and actions, he was acting in justice and righteousness. In this way, the LORD was vindicating or justifying his holy and majestic name. (Exodus 10:1-2; 14:17-18)

God's power and authority over the Pharaoh—and over every other world ruler—was seen to be supreme. Not even the most evil of world rulers could stand against the majestic and sovereign power of Almighty God.

In the next verse, Paul summarises verses 14 to 17. Thus, in verse 18, the apostle writes:

**Romans 9:18**

God exercises mercy toward whom he will—regardless of personal merit or desert, and regardless of anything God knows that person will do or accomplish in the future. Similarly, God hardens whom he wants to harden—making them insensitive to his Word, to the gospel, or to the way of repentance and salvation.

Those, however, whom God thus hardens, have—like the Pharaoh of Egypt—already hardened their own hearts, minds and wills through persistent, deliberate and inexcusable disregard for, or disobedience to, the Word of God. Thus, when God hardens their hearts, he is simply acting in justice. They have despised his mercy and his grace. God, therefore, is dealing with them as their wicked hearts and lives deserve. (Rom. 1:24-28; cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-12)

**Sons of the Living God****Romans 9:19-29**

At this point in his discussion, the apostle Paul anticipates an objection to his remarks about God's sovereign choice, and of his election of one person and rejection of another. Thus, in verse 19, the apostle writes:

**Romans 9:19**

Is God unfair? God is sovereign. He chooses one person and rejects another. Yet, this choice is purely according to God's sovereign will and purposes, and not according to any good or merit foreseen in the person chosen. Why, then, does God blame us if we were not chosen unto salvation and holiness of life, but are left to the practise of our sins?

This line of argument is both false and malicious. All men and women are sinners. No one deserves to be chosen to salvation and eternal life. Rather, all without exception deserve only the just wrath of God culminating in eternal punishment.

God did not *make* any man or woman a sinner. We became sinners by our connection with Adam (original sin exemplified in the sinful nature) and also by our own sinful attitudes and practises. Thus, while we remain unforgiven and alienated from God by our sin, we merit only God's wrath and condemnation. This is God's justice and righteousness in action, and this accords perfectly with his holy character. Thus, none of us can rightly blame God for our sinful condition, for our sinful practices, or for the punishment that God justly imposes on us as sinful human beings.

Men and women are wholly responsible, and accountable to God, for their own personal actions. In the case of unregenerate men and women, the fact that their thoughts, attitudes and actions remain constantly biased toward sin is a reflection of their own sinful hearts and their own personal choices for evil rather than for good. When, therefore, God condemns a sinful man or woman, he does so justly and as his holy and righteous character requires.

It is a specious argument, therefore, to assert that no one can resist God's will. It would be gross presumption ever to make the attempt. God chooses whom he will. Although sinners deserve only condemnation, God sovereignly determines to show mercy to some. In fact, this amounts to an innumerable multitude of the redeemed people of God—all of whom were undeserving of God's love, mercy and grace. (Rom. 5:8; cf. Rev. 5:9-14)

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God's Word, however, does not permit sinful human beings to challenge his ways or to call into question his character or his sovereign decisions. Thus, in verse 20, the apostle Paul continues by declaring:

### **Romans 9:20**

(See Isa. 29:16; 45:9)

No human being (not even a perfect human being, if such existed) has the right to talk back to God. God is mankind's Creator. Mankind is merely the creation. He is not in any position to challenge or question his Maker. For a created being to attempt to talk back to the Most Holy, Almighty and Sovereign God of all creation would be folly of the utmost magnitude and gross presumption.

Paul alludes to Isaiah the prophet, and perhaps also to Jeremiah in the next part of verse 20. There, it is imagined (foolishly) that a clay pot or other lifeless vessel was in a position to talk back to the potter, its creator, and to question his wisdom in forming the vessel in a particular manner. If this position is unthinkable and absurd, how much more so the idea that fallen sinful human beings can talk back to God or question his decisions or his actions?

God cannot do wrong, nor can he act inconsistently with his righteous character. If it is right for him to make sovereign choices, then the principle itself must be right in a perfect and all-holy Being. As sinners, however, we are not in any position to pass judgments on such matters, or to consider any of God's actions as unjust or unfair. From the very nature of his person, we know that God cannot act unjustly or unfairly—otherwise, he would cease to be God.

Undeniably, then, the most holy and infinite God has the right—and does exercise the right—to act according to his own sovereign will. No sinful and finite human being, however, has the right to question or challenge God's ways. To this end, Paul asks in verse 21:

### **Romans 9:21**

The potter retains an unquestionable right to form his vessels as he sees fit and as are best suited to his purposes. (Jer. 18:5-6) Someone may contend that a potter deals merely with inanimate objects, not with living, thinking human beings. This is true. However, the potter is only a human analogy for the Creator God. Unlike any human potter, God is uniquely qualified to direct or shape the lives of human beings as he sees fit and according to his divine purposes.

God, however, never creates men or women evil. We all inherit a sinful nature from Adam, and we become evil of our own choice and by the exercise of our own free will. In his mercy, however, God chooses to redeem, cleanse and equip some of these worthless vessels, and to shape them again for his own purposes and for his own glory. Others, however, God chooses to leave to the just punishment of their chosen sins and sinful ways. Like the Pharaoh, they may ultimately harden their hearts against God their Creator. In course of time, however, God eventually hardens their hearts or gives them over to their cherished sins and their own evil desires until the day of final judgment.

In verse 22, Paul continues by asking:

### **Romans 9:22**

God is the divine Sovereign of the universe. At a stroke, and by the exercise of his almighty power—or by his word of command—God could wipe out of the universe every-

thing that offends his holy person and all who sin against their Creator. He *could* do so, but this would not accord with God's sovereign purposes for his creation. Yes, God will yet judge sinful mankind and he will destroy all impenitent and unforgiven sinners. Indeed, even now, God's wrath and (temporal) judgment rests permanently upon every sinful human being. (John 3:18,36)

Why, then, does God delay in destroying sinners from the face of the earth? He delays his righteous judgment because, in his great patience, tolerance or forbearance, he is leaving open the possibility of their repentance and forgiveness. If, however, they continue to reject God's offer of mercy and grace, then ultimately they will endure God's wrath. They will harden their hearts against the things of the spirit, against God and against his Word—including the message of forgiveness and redemption. At this point, they will make themselves the objects of God's wrath—prepared for destruction. This does not mean that God foreordained them to destruction, but rather that—by their own sinful and rebellious actions and attitudes—they have prepared themselves for God's destruction of ungodly men and women. (2 Pet. 3:3-13)

Yet, God bore with such sinful men and women for a specific purpose. Had he destroyed all sinners immediately, as their attitudes and actions deserved, no one would have been left to experience the riches of God's grace and mercy. God, of course, could have created mankind anew. Instead, however, he chose to show mercy on sinful men, women and young people, and to extend that mercy to individuals, families and groups from every nation under heaven. God would grant this mercy to every single person whom he called by his Holy Spirit to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, God had a very good reason for showing such forbearance toward sinful men and women.

Paul elaborates on this in verses 23 and 24 by asking:

#### **Romans 9:23-24**

God spares all sinners from immediate destruction in order to show mercy to some. Ultimately, this amounts to a countless multitude of redeemed people. Thus, God enhances his glory. Instead of acting only in righteousness and justice—as he could have done—God determines to show love, mercy and compassion to a vast multitude of sinful men and women. God does this even although every one of these individuals deserves only his wrath and judgment. In showing mercy, however, to those who do not deserve mercy, God glorifies his name.

Yet, the Lord has reserved even greater mercies for those whom he loves, and whom he calls to himself through faith in Christ Jesus. He has prepared each of them for a place in his glorious presence. During their lives on earth, God's Spirit continues to prepare and equip them for the day when they will finally be transformed and presented faultless and blameless before Almighty God—their loving heavenly Father, and his Son their Lord and Redeemer. (John 14:1-3)

In verse 24, Paul specifies who these people are to whom God will show mercy. They constitute all those whom God calls by his Spirit. These men and women are elected and called from among the Jewish people and from among the non-Jewish people, or Gentiles. Thus, God calls his people from among all nations on the face of the earth.

Paul confirms God's sovereign intentions by quoting from the prophets of the OT Scriptures. Thus, in verse 25, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 9:25**

(See Hosea 2:23)

In this passage from Hosea, the prophet is referring to God's dealings with unfaithful Israel and their subsequent restoration to the favour and blessing of God. The LORD God had punished Israel because they had not remained faithful and obedient to him, but had cherished false gods or idols in their hearts. Following God's punishment of them and upon their repentance, however, God promises to call them once again 'my people' and to call Israel once more 'my loved one'.

The apostle Paul applies the general principles of this passage from Hosea to the passage now under discussion in his letter to the believers at Rome. Just as, on this occasion, God chose to show mercy to unfaithful Israel, so he chooses to show mercy to whom he will, and to call whom he will to repentance and faith in his Son. Thus, applying the principle previously applied to Israel, God promises to call them (i.e. repentant and believing sinners) '*my people*' who previously were not God's people. Rather, they had alienated themselves from God and his love by their former unbelief and by their evil attitudes and behaviour. But to all of these sinners whom God's Spirit draws to repentance and faith, God promises that—like Israel before them—he will call them his people and his loved ones.

At this point, Paul quotes from another passage in Hosea. Thus, in verse 26 of Romans 9, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 9:26**

(See Hosea 1:10)

Once again, this passage refers to the restoration of Israel and to their subsequent reunion with Judah under one leader. Once again, if and when Israel decided to forsake her unfaithful ways, the LORD God would restore her as his own people. No longer would God say that Israel was not his people (because of their evil deeds). Rather, upon their repentance and return to the Lord, God would forgive and reconcile them to himself. Then, he would call them '*sons of the living God*'.

Thus it is with all those whom God calls to repentance and faith, and whom he reconciles to himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. When called by God's Spirit, they are regenerated or born again (from above) by the power of that same Holy Spirit. Thus, by regeneration (and by adoption), every true believer is called a son or daughter of the living God. (John 1:12-13) All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. However, not everyone will call upon the Lord for mercy and salvation because not everyone has been given to the Son from eternity and not everyone is thus enabled by the Holy Spirit to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 6:37,39; 17:2,6,9,24)

An example of this is the nation of Israel. Previously, Israel was greatly blessed and favoured by God. Yet, at the present time, God has set them aside and withheld the abundance of his blessings from the vast majority of the Jewish people. For the time being at least, only a small number (comparatively) of Jewish people come to true repentance and genuine saving faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Thus, in verses 27 and 28, Paul writes:

### **Romans 9:27-28**

(See Isaiah 10:22-23)

Before considering this verse, let us refer back for a moment to Hosea 1:10 as quoted by Paul in verse 26 above. The apostle did not quote the entire verse from Hosea. Prior to the sentence actually quoted by the apostle, the LORD had said through Hosea concerning Israel:

Hosea 1:10



10a *"Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted..."* (NIV)

In the same verse, Hosea then continues this prophecy by declaring:

10b *"...In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they will be called 'sons of the living God'."* (NIV)

This is the context in which Paul quotes Isaiah in Romans 9:27 where this prophet too refers to Israel as being like the sand by the sea for number. Paul is making the point that—although God makes Israel extremely numerous as a people—yet their numbers will not guarantee God's continued blessings upon them or favour with them. This is dependent on their faithfulness and obedience to God. Indeed, because of their rejection of God's abundant blessings available to them in Christ Jesus, the Jewish people have cut themselves off from God's favour—although not finally and not totally. For this reason, however, only a small number or 'remnant' will be saved.

The passage quoted by Paul from Isaiah 10:22-23 explains this very point. There, God says that although Israel is like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return.

What was true of Israel in relation to their *physical* captivity is true of all sinners in relation to their *spiritual* captivity. Just as God delivered Israel from their slavery to Assyria and brought the remnant of Israel back to their own land, so the Lord delivers repentant and believing sinners from the slavery to sin. He grants them new life in Christ together with the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

Like the remnant of Israel, however, only a small number (comparatively) will be delivered or saved. This, however, will include all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The remainder of sinful mankind abides under God's judgment. Just as God judged sinners of Isaiah's time *'with speed and finality'*, so also will the Lord judge all sinners for their impenitent and rebellious ways.

Yet, the Lord our God is ever merciful. Although, in justice and righteousness, God might have destroyed the entire nation of Israel for their evil and rebellious ways, he determined to show mercy to some—even to a remnant of that nation. Thus, in verse 29, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 9:29**

(See Isaiah 1:9)

## **Christ, the 'Stumbling-Stone'**

### **Romans 9:30-33**

Had God treated Israel as their sins deserved and as he treated Sodom and Gomorrah for their flagrant sexual immorality and perversion, not one Israelite person would have survived God's judgment. The Lord would have destroyed all of them for their sin and unfaithfulness to him. Not even a remnant would have been spared. (Gen. 19:1-29; see also Ch. 18:16-33)

Nevertheless, in his sovereign grace and mercy, the Lord did not totally destroy Israel. Although he punished his sinful and rebellious people, and although many of them lost their (physical) lives because of their sinful ways, yet God still spared a remnant for himself. Even today, God continues to spare a remnant of Israel to inherit his blessings in Christ. One day, however, God will extend salvation to Israel as a nation. This is in accord with God's purposes in election, and in fulfilment of his promises to the patriarchs.

At this stage, someone may begin to imagine that God shows mercy to ungodly but repentant Gentiles while rejecting Jews even although they endeavour to live upright and godly lives. This, however, would be to misunderstand the true situation. God accepts everyone—whether Jew or Gentile—through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, everyone who rejects God's Son places himself or herself outside of God's love and mercy through their unbelief in the Saviour and their continuing impenitence toward God. Thus, in verses 30 to 32a, the apostle Paul writes:

### **Romans 9:30-32a**

A person may be inclined to think that unrighteous Gentiles find mercy and favour with God whereas 'righteous' Jews do not. This, however, is to misunderstand the nature of the righteousness that God accepts. These repentant and believing Gentiles did not pursue righteousness; i.e. they did not attempt to make themselves acceptable to God by righteous acts, moral goodness or any other good works. On the contrary, they accepted that—as sinners—they could not earn or work for their own righteousness.

Expressed differently, they accepted that they could not be justified in God's sight by their own good works or works of righteousness. Instead, they accepted the gift of righteousness, which comes from God through faith in his Son. Thus, God counted their faith in his Son as righteousness, and thereby justified them or declared them righteous in his sight (cf. Rom. 4:1-8).

For the most part, however, the Jews did not accept the righteousness that comes from God. On the contrary, they rejected faith in Christ as the means of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Instead, they set about trying to establish their own righteousness. The Jews did not, however, base this righteousness on faith but on human effort, human achievement, good living and good deeds. (Rom. 10:3)

Such actions, however, proceeded from a heart and life that was still alienated from God by an inherently sinful nature and by unforgiven sin. Thus, a person's good deeds or 'works of righteousness' become totally contaminated and corrupted by their sinful nature and for this reason they are totally unacceptable to God. Indeed, the Jews were well aware of this fact, because God had plainly stated to them through the prophet Isaiah that all their righteous deeds were like filthy rags in his sight (Isa. 64:6).

Thus, one of the reasons that the Jewish people did not attain the righteousness that comes from God by faith was because—instead of accepting it as a gift through faith in God's Son—they rejected God's Son and thus also the gift of righteousness. The Jews then endeavoured to attain righteousness by their own efforts or by their observance of law. Principally, this meant observance of the Mosaic Law, but it also included adherence to many man-made rules, regulations and traditions.

In verses 32 to 33, Paul confirms why the Jewish people could not experience God's righteousness as a gift. Thus, beginning with the latter part of verse 32, the apostle declares:

### **Romans 9:32b-33**

(See Isa. 8:14; 28:16)

Writing by inspiration and authority of God's Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul quotes from and unites parts of two passages from the prophet Isaiah. In full, the first of these passages from Isaiah chapter 8 verses 13 and 14 reads as follows:

Isaiah 8:13-14 (NIV)

*13 “The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,  
he is the one you are to fear,  
he is the one you are to dread,*

*14 and he will be a sanctuary;  
but for both houses of Israel he will be  
a stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.  
And for the people of Jerusalem he will be  
a trap and a snare.”*

Here, the LORD God is speaking to and through the prophet Isaiah. The LORD warns Isaiah not to accommodate himself to the ways of backsliding Israel. He also warns the holy prophet not to be afraid either of God’s rebellious people, or of the nation whom the LORD would send to punish Israel; namely, Assyria. God commanded Isaiah to fear only him. Then, the prophet would find a sanctuary or place of safety in the hallowed presence of God.

For backsliding Israel, however, the Lord would be to them ‘a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ Only when they returned to the Lord with all their hearts would God re-establish them as his people.

The second passage quoted by Paul is from Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16, and it reads as follows:

Isaiah 28:16 (NIV)

*16 So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:  
“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,  
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;  
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.*

Once again, this passage refers to God’s judgment on Israel—both priests and people—for their continuing unfaithfulness to him. God had decreed to send the Assyrian nation against Israel to punish his rebellious people, yet he will preserve for himself a remnant. In spite of the people’s unfaithfulness, the LORD will still lay his promised ‘stone’ in Zion (i.e. the temple mount at Jerusalem). God declares this stone to be a precious cornerstone and a sure foundation. Anyone trusting in that ‘stone’ will never be dismayed.

In Romans 9:33, Paul interprets this stone as the Messiah or Christ whom God promised through the prophets. Thus, considering Romans 9:32b-33, Paul is saying that the Jews stumbled over this stone because they did not believe that Christ was the Messiah promised by God through the OT prophets. Thus, too, the stone that God laid in Zion (Christ) causes unbelieving Jews (and unbelieving Gentiles) to stumble or fall. Yet, for every one who trusts in this stone, they will never be dismayed or put to shame. Christ is their confidence, their Rock and their sure foundation for time and for eternity.

Thus, we may summarise this passage as follows: Paul uses the general principle established in the two passages from Isaiah (chapters 8 and 28) to illustrate Israel’s present situation. Israel has not attained righteousness before God. This is because the righteousness that God accepts is only available as a gift from God. God freely bestows this gift upon everyone that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and who has been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, is the very Rock or Stone over which the Jews have stumbled in unbelief. Thus, Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled

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both in relation to God's judgment of Israel by Assyria and subsequently by Israel's rejection of God's promised Messiah.

God laid in Zion or Jerusalem a stone that caused men to stumble: That is, God sent his Son—the Stone—to his people. The Jews, however, rejected God's Son as their Messiah. Thus, they rejected the only way of salvation and of finding true righteousness and peace with God. (Acts 4:12) Anyone, however—Jew or Gentile—who trusts in this 'Stone' (Christ) will never be put to shame; i.e. they will never experience disappointment in the word or promises of God. God has guaranteed them the gifts of righteousness, justification, and eternal life through faith in his Son. He will most certainly remain true and faithful to his word and to his promises.

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## Romans Chapter 10

### All Who Call, Will be Saved

#### **Romans 10:1-13**

Paul has demonstrated why God set Israel aside for the present; namely, because of their unbelief and rejection of the Saviour. Stumbling, as they did, over the stumbling-stone, the Jews cut themselves off from God's favour and blessings. Yet, up to the present day, the Jewish people (like many others) continue to seek God's blessings by human effort and deeds of righteousness

Paul is not intending to find fault with the people of Israel for their dilemma, even although their own unbelief resulted in this situation. The apostle Paul knows exactly how these Jewish people think, feel and act. He knows that many among them possess a deep desire to please God and to find acceptance with God. However, in their ignorance of God's true character, of his holy Law's demands, and of their own sinful nature, they cannot hope to succeed by their own zealous efforts.

Nevertheless, Paul fully sympathises with the Jewish people. As a Jew himself and a former Pharisee, the apostle understands very well the mind of the Jew; especially, as that mind is blinded to spiritual truths, including the glorious truths of the gospel. Paul, however, does more than express sympathy with his Jewish brothers and sisters by race. He earnestly desires their salvation. Thus, the apostle begins chapter 10 of Romans by writing in verse 1:

#### **Romans 10:1**

Paul does not consider himself in any sense superior to his fellow Jews because he has come to know Christ as Messiah, while they have not. Rather, the apostle is deeply concerned for Israel's spiritual welfare. He longs with all his heart to see them turn to Christ in repentance and faith. Indeed, his earnest prayer to God on their behalf is that they might be truly saved. Paul fully acknowledges that—in their own way—the Jews do have a zeal for God. Thus, in verse 2, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 10:2**

From his former way of life among the Jews, and as a Pharisee, the apostle Paul knows that a number of the Jewish people do have a deep and sincere zeal for God and for the things of God. Yet, says Paul, this religious zeal is not based on knowledge. Granted, God gave them the OT Scriptures. They possess an intellectual knowledge of these Holy Scriptures. However, they do not have a full or complete knowledge of the profound spiritual truths that these Scriptures express. Nor do they possess a full or complete knowledge of God's means of salvation, or of the Law and its holy demands, or of themselves and of their sinfulness and spiritual helplessness in the sight of God. Yes, they do have a zeal for God, but it is a zeal for the observance of externals (rites, regulations, ceremonies and traditions). Their zeal is not based on knowledge; that is, on a correct or accurate knowledge and understanding of spiritual matters.

(Incidentally, the word translated here as 'knowledge' is not the general word for knowledge (*gnosis*) but rather the emphasised form meaning 'full' or 'complete knowledge' (*epignosis*). This is the kind of knowledge necessary to a full understanding of any subject. Assuming the enlightening power and presence of the Holy Spirit, this includes a full

understanding of God's Word, together with the gospel message. The Jews, however, did not possess this kind of knowledge. Nor did they have the Spirit of God to enlighten their minds or to grant knowledge and understanding of spiritual truths to their hearts and minds. Thus, for all their zeal for God, they remained in ignorance of the truth, or in spiritual darkness.)

In verse 3, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 10:3**

The Jews sought righteousness. They sought to justify themselves in the eyes of God and men by their observance of the Law and by their 'righteous' acts. However, they did not seek the righteousness that comes as a gift from God. They believed that a person had to earn his or her righteousness. Similarly, they believed that God would only grant his favour and blessings to those who lived righteously and in strict conformity with the Law and with the rules, regulations and traditions of the Jewish religion.

Essentially, then, the Jewish people believed in legal righteousness or the attainment of justification in God's eyes through self-effort and good works. However, in establishing their own form of righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness; namely, righteousness freely granted (together with justification) through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jewish method of striving after righteousness was contrary, however, to the pattern set them by their forefather Abraham. God counted Abraham righteous in his sight—and justified him—through faith, not by any attempts to observe laws or to earn eternal life through self-effort or good works (Gen. 15:6). Many years later, Abraham proved the validity of his faith when—in obedience to God—he offered his son Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22:1-18; James 2:21-24). From the time of Abraham, then, God has justified sinners by faith—contrary to the later beliefs of the Jews.

At a later stage, God introduced the Law through Moses. The purpose of the Law was to identify and highlight man's sinfulness. God also gave his Law to reveal to men and women his perfect standard of righteousness (as exemplified by the Law's requirements), and to prove that no one could attain to this standard of righteousness by his own efforts. The Law, therefore, could only condemn sinful mankind, since they could not be saved by keeping it (perfectly) (Gal. 3:17-25).

This, however, is where the Lord Jesus enters the picture, in accordance with God's plans from eternity. Thus, in verse 4, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 10:4**

No one can experience God's salvation by observing the Law of Moses. God never intended his Law to be the instrument of salvation (Gal. 3:21-22). (Theoretically, this could only become a possibility if a person could keep it perfectly from the very beginning of his life to the very end, without failing in even one point. Even this hypothetical example, however, would not remedy the sinful nature imputed to him from Adam.)

God did not give the Law as an instrument of salvation but as a code of morals and ethics (or holy and righteous standards) for daily living. Unlike any other ethical code, however, the Almighty God himself gave this code to the Hebrew people. It therefore expressed the words and reflected the character of the living Sovereign God. God's Law, therefore, was and is absolutely just, holy and good.

From a spiritual point of view, the purpose of the Law was to make the sinner fully aware of his sin and sinful nature. It was intended to reveal to the sinner God's just penalty for sin (i.e. death) and to convict his conscience of his very great need of redemption. Again, the Law was intended to make a person aware of God's abiding wrath and curse on un-



forgiven sinners, including those who failed to keep his Law perfectly (Gal. 3:10-14). Ultimately, however, one of the most glorious and significant purposes of God's Law was to lead or point sinners to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Righteousness and justification, therefore, come through faith in Christ and in obedience to the gospel message. No one can attain righteousness or justification through observance of the Law or through the practise of good works or pious deeds. Thus, Christ is the end of the Law to everyone who believes (on him).

This does not mean that Christ cancels the Ten Commandments or any of its principles. As a moral and ethical code, these commandments still bind all mankind. Christ, however, is the end of the law of statutes and ordinances regulating temple worship and the former means of approach to God. Christ is the end of the Law in that he has fulfilled every demand of that Law against the sinner. By his death and resurrection, Christ has abrogated the law condemning the sinner and demanding the death penalty for sin. In addition, Christ is the end of the Law in that the redeemed and forgiven sinner no longer lives under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14; Eph. 2:15).

Paul begins to explain some of these points from verse 5, where he writes:

### **Romans 10:5**

(See Lev. 18:5)

Paul quotes this passage from Leviticus chapter 18 verse 5. In that chapter, the LORD had said to the Israelites that they were not to follow the ungodly and idolatrous example of the Canaanites. On the contrary, God commanded Israel to obey his laws and to follow his decrees. Those who obeyed would live by them; that is, God's word and commandments would be food for the soul and would guide a person in the good and the right way throughout his or her life (Lev. 18:1-5)

God gave these laws to the Israelites for their guidance and direction in this life—not as a means of attaining eternal life. As has been said before, to attain eternal life by the law, a person would need to keep it perfectly from the very beginning of his life to the very end, without failing in any one point. Clearly, no sinful human being is capable of doing this; therefore, righteousness by the law is unattainable. God, however, will not accept anything less than perfect righteousness if a person is to be justified in his sight. Thus, another way must be found of obtaining that righteousness that is acceptable to God.

Paul now continues to speak of this righteousness in the following verses. As we will see, this righteousness cannot be earned by works of the law, but can only be received through faith in Christ.

Thus, in verse 6 and 7, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 10:6-7**

(See Deut. 30:12,13)

Here, Paul is alluding to Deuteronomy chapter 30 verses 11-14. The apostle is referring to the example of Israel in that passage, and he is applying the principle of trust in God and obedience to his Word to the present case involving faith in God.

In Deuteronomy chapter 30, God promised to bless and prosper Israel provided they trusted and obeyed him with all their heart. God had already made known his will and ways to them. Thus, the people of Israel knew precisely what God required of them by way of trust and obedience in order to obtain his abundant blessings. They could not,

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therefore, claim that they did not know or understand God's ways, for what God commanded was neither too difficult for them nor beyond their reach (Deut. 30:11)

In full, this passage from Deuteronomy chapter 30 reads as follows:

*11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it. (NIV)*

In temporal terms, obedience to God and faith in his word was (and is) the only way to true peace and righteousness.

In Romans chapter 10, verses 6 and 7, the apostle Paul now applies the basic principles of Israel's example of faith and obedience to the present situation. Like Israel, no one could say that they did not understand God's way of righteousness, or that it was beyond their reach. God had revealed that way to them in his Word and through his Son—the same Son of Righteousness whom he had sent down to earth. Thus, God's righteousness was not beyond a person's reach, but was freely available to everyone who believed. It was not at the ends of the earth, or across the vast expanse of the seas, or in the depths of the abyss.

Where, then, is this righteousness to be found? Where is the righteousness that God accepts, that cannot be earned, yet is within reach? Paul answers this in verses 8 and 9. Once again, the apostle bases his remarks on Deuteronomy 30:14, expanding them as directed by the Holy Spirit and as appropriate to the present situation.

### **Romans 10:8-9**

(See Deut. 30:14)

Where does God reveal his ways and promise his gift of righteousness to all who believe? He reveals it in his Word. He reveals it to men and women through the preaching, hearing or reading of his Word, the Bible. God reveals his gift of righteousness through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the 'word of faith' that the apostles and other faithful servants of God proclaimed to all mankind. Attached to this proclamation of the gospel was God's solemn assurance to all who believed:

*"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (v.9 NIV)*

Salvation includes God's gift of righteousness, and God grants it to every person who fulfills these two conditions:

That they confess, openly and publicly, that Jesus is Lord.

That they believe with all their heart (with all their faculties of mind and soul) that God raised from the dead the One who died for their sins.

These are the only two conditions recognised in the Word of God as being essential to salvation. Without them, however, no one can inherit God's gift of righteousness or eternal life.

To confess that Jesus is Lord means much more than confessing and acknowledging him as our personal Lord and Saviour—essential as this is. To confess that Jesus is Lord means that we confess and acknowledge Jesus, the Son of God, to be the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. It is to acknowledge that—as King of kings and Lord of lords—the

Lord Jesus is pre-eminent above all others (except his own Father with whom he is equal). It is to acknowledge that—as Sovereign Lord—Jesus is the one to whom every created being in heaven and earth must give account. We could not expect a new believer to understand comprehensively the import of these terms. All that is required of him is that he acknowledges with all his heart that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

The above is only a very brief summary of what the Scripture means when it says that Jesus is Lord. Indeed, this is an expression of Christ's deity and full equality with his Father.

To believe that God raised Jesus his Son from the dead implies wholehearted belief in an actual, literal and bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the Scriptures clearly teach. To deny the literal and physical resurrection of Christ from the dead is to deny the faith. However, to confess one's faith in the literal bodily resurrection of Christ by the Father is evidence that the Holy Spirit has regenerated that person. This is true also of those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ; for no one can acknowledge that Jesus is Lord unless the Holy Spirit indwells that person. Thus, by a simple confession of Jesus' supreme Lordship over all creation, and by wholeheartedly believing that God raised him from the dead, a person is saved and granted eternal life.

This, of course, implies that God has counted that person's faith as righteousness and that he has formally justified the believing sinner. This means that God has declared the believer righteous in his sight. Now, when God looks upon his redeemed child, he sees only the imputed righteousness of his own Son in the believer's life and character. This is the gift of righteousness that God bestows upon all who believe on the name of his Son. Never again, then, can God's law condemn that person—for he is clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

In verse 10, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 10:10**

This simple heartfelt expression of faith represents the one and only way through which a person can enter the Kingdom of God. Those who, with all their heart and soul believe on the Son of God and his redeeming work on their behalf, God justifies. God saves all those who openly, unashamedly, and publicly confess that Jesus is Lord. This is just saying much the same thing in different ways. For anyone whom God justifies he also saves; and to those whom he saves, God grants eternal life.

The heart represents the deepest recesses of a person's inmost being. It is the very source of his thoughts, hopes, intentions, emotions, desires, words and deeds. Those who commit themselves wholeheartedly to faith in Christ are surrendering themselves to Christ's sovereign control. In addition, they are expressing their unreserved trust and confidence in him as their Saviour and Lord. Anyone whom the Spirit of God thus constrains to confess and acknowledge Christ as their Lord, is constrained by their own spirit to confess Christ before others. He or she does this both by way of testimony and as a witness to the wonderful works of God.

In verse 11, Paul continues:

#### **Romans 10:11**

(See Isa. 28:16)

Once more, the apostle quotes from the OT Scriptures in support of his argument. Paul had referred to his passage from Isaiah earlier in this chapter of Romans. Now, he assures his readers that God remains true and faithful to his Word. God justifies all who believe on his Son; and no one who trusts in the Son of God will ever be put to shame or

face disappointment concerning their salvation. God has promised to provide complete salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus, and he will never disappoint anyone who genuinely trusts in him.

God, however, does not reserve his blessings or his salvation for certain nations only. On the contrary, the message of the gospel reaches men, women and children of every nation on earth. To this end, the apostle writes in verse 12:

### **Romans 10:12**

God does not show favouritism, nor does he distinguish unjustly between people of one nation and those of another. Even when God chose Israel as his own people and made known his ways to that nation alone, it was on the understanding that all nations on earth were to be blessed through Israel. This was the promise God gave originally to Abraham. Israel was to be the means through whom God's salvation would come to the entire world. (Gen. 12:3)

Following the redeeming work of Christ, the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile has been broken down. God's salvation through faith in Christ is truly available to anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord—regardless of his or her nationality, colour or creed. Moreover, God blesses equally and abundantly everyone who seeks his mercy and forgiveness. Thus, in verse 13, the apostle Paul writes:

### **Romans 10:13**

(See Joel 2:32)

Once more, the apostle quotes from the OT Scriptures. Here, God in his faithfulness promises to restore and deliver Israel in the latter days. Then, everyone who calls on the name of the LORD [YHWH] will be saved: everyone whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:32)

Paul is assuring his readers that what applies to Israel applies to them also. Anyone—whoever they are—who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. By his or her faith in Christ, God will deliver that person from his wrath and condemnation on unrepentant sinners, and from the judgment and wrath to come. By that person's faith in Christ, God will justify him or her, and adopt that person as his own redeemed child. In addition, he will grant to this newly born again child full rights of inheritance in his family together with the gifts of abundant and eternal life.

This applies to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord; that is, to everyone who embraces Christ in true repentance and genuine faith. God makes his salvation freely available to anyone who calls on the name of his Son. Effectively, this means that anyone who responds in repentance and faith to the invitation of the gospel will be saved.

## **Israel Rejects God's Message**

### ***Romans 10:14-21***

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Yet, here a potential problem arises, as Paul records in verses 14 and 15a:

### **Romans 10:14-15a**

As a rule, God entrusts his Word and his message of salvation to his own redeemed and holy people. Theirs is the responsibility to make known God's Word and God's way of salvation to the entire world.

This passage makes it abundantly plain that—concerning adults and older children at least—their salvation depends on their believing and accepting the gospel message. However, no sinner can call on the name of the Lord if he has never heard of the name of the Lord, and has no knowledge of the gospel message. Thus, it is essential that Christ is preached or proclaimed to men, women and young people of every nation under heaven. This includes the message of his coming into the world, of his substitutionary and atoning death for sinners, of his glorious bodily resurrection and exaltation, and of his coming again.

Here again we see the church's duty and responsibility to appoint and send into the world men and women to teach and preach the message of salvation. God, however, does not limit the dissemination of the gospel to this means alone. Anyone who knows the Lord Jesus as his or her personal Saviour is responsible before God for making known the Lord's name and for explaining the way of salvation to lost and perishing men and women. To this end, the apostle Paul writes in verse 15b:

### **Romans 10:15b**

(See Isa. 52:7)

This reference from the prophet Isaiah alludes to the messenger or courier who ran from the battlefield back to the ruler and his people to inform them of progress in the battle. The king and his people would wait apprehensively for the courier to arrive, but they rejoiced when he returned from the battle scene carrying good and encouraging news. Isaiah uses this metaphor to illustrate the good news of Israel's deliverance from captivity and exile. Paul now extends this metaphor further by using it to illustrate the good news—or gospel—of deliverance from sin, Satan and hell.

The phrase, '*How beautiful are the feet,*' etc. just means 'How welcome is the approach' or 'How wonderful is the arrival' of the person who brings this good news of deliverance.

In the prophet Isaiah's time, God brought to Israel the good news of deliverance from captivity and freedom from their enemies. However, not every Israelite welcomed this good news with open arms. Perhaps, they had become accustomed to living among ungodly and worldly people and did not wish to abandon this way of life. At any rate, many of the Israelites of that generation rejected God's message and God's messengers—the holy prophets.

Thus, in verse 16 of Romans 10, Paul writes:

### **Romans 10:16**

(See Isa. 53:1)

Although God promised deliverance or salvation to the people of Israel, Israel—for the most part—rejected God's message of deliverance. God promised salvation through his suffering Servant. However, for the most part, Israel despised and rejected the Holy One of God when he came. They did not believe God's message, and this is why God has set them aside for the present time.

Without faith in God and his Word, it is impossible to experience God's free salvation. To this end, the apostle Paul writes in verse 17:

### **Romans 10:17**

Faith is essential to salvation. This faith comes through hearing, understanding and believing God's message or way of salvation. God's way of salvation is revealed to mankind

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through their hearing the gospel and believing on the one of whom the gospel speaks; viz., the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who believes on Christ receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Anyone who disbelieves the message and rejects Christ, or who ignores him, remains under God's condemnation and wrath. That person will never see life. (John 3:16,18,36)

Paul now raises the question as to whether Israel had indeed heard the good news. Thus, in verse 18, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 10:18**

(See Psalm 19:4)

Of course, they heard, declares Paul. Certainly, they knew God's way.

In verse 18, Paul is citing from Psalm 19. This Psalm testifies to the fact that the whole natural creation proclaims the existence and glory of God. Only those who wilfully refuse to acknowledge God as Creator of the universe can remain blind and deaf to spiritual realities. However, if a person denies God's hand in creation, then he is denying him as his Creator, his Provider and his Redeemer.

Israel certainly knew God's truths. God had revealed it to them in his natural creation (as he did also to every other nation on earth). However, in addition to this, God had revealed his Word and his good news of salvation to Israel through the OT prophets. Therefore, Israel's rejection of the Messiah was culpable and inexcusable.

Paul, however, considers the possibility that—although Israel heard the message—they did not understand the message; at least, they may have failed to grasp its full spiritual significance. Thus, in verse 19, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 10:19**

(See Deut. 32:21)

This time, Paul quotes from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32. There, God warns Israel that persistent unfaithfulness will lead to their exile and captivity in a foreign land. However, from among such foreign nations, God will one day grant an understanding and believing heart and mind. Thus, in days to come, these believing foreigners will make Israel jealous through their understanding of God's ways and through their belief in his Word. Those whom once were considered not a people, God will make his people—calling them from among every nation on earth. Thus, by their loss of God's blessings and their (supposed) exclusive claim on God, Israel is once more provoked to jealousy. Yet, this situation has arisen only because of this people's wilful unbelief and hardness of heart.

Confirming that God will grant an understanding and believing heart to anyone who seeks for him—including the heathen or Gentile nations—the apostle Paul writes in verse 20:

### **Romans 10:20**

(See Isa. 65:1)

God had revealed his ways and his will to Israel. Israel, however, had stubbornly refused to follow God's ways or to obey his will. God, therefore, turned to those who did not seek for him or ask to know his ways; viz. the heathen or Gentile peoples. However, once God had revealed himself to these heathen nations, many of these people began to seek the Lord and to call upon his name for mercy.

Unlike Israel, these Gentiles heard and responded to the voice of God speaking through the natural creation and through the message of God's Word or God's prophets. Consequently, they came to recognise their sin and need and they sought the mercy of the Lord.

Those who sought the Lord found the Lord, and God granted to them a place in his kingdom. Thus, if formerly ignorant and ungodly Gentiles could hear, understand and believe the Word of God, no excuse remained for Israel: For God had given to Israel his written Word and had sent to them numerous holy prophets. Thus, in verse 21, Paul says,

**Romans 10:21**

(See Isa. 65:2)

This summarises what we have already said about Israel. Israel knew God's will and God's ways because God had revealed his ways to them on many occasions and to successive generations. Yet, although Israel knew and understood the truth, they would not obey the truth. On the contrary, they disobeyed God's commands and rejected his words.

In addition, they refused to believe the words of God's messengers, the prophets. God had sent these prophets to warn his rebellious people of coming judgment on their sinful way of life. However, Israel rejected the message and the messengers. Some of these holy men of God they stoned; others, they killed. Thus, for their obstinacy and rebellion, God gave Israel over to a hardened heart and an insensitive mind. Now, those who *would* not believe the truth *could* not believe the truth. Even to the present day, a veil covers their minds.

When, however, God in his grace removes this veil, Israel will once more be able to see and believe the truth. God will grant to them an opportunity of believing on Christ—his eternal Son—as their Messiah and the Redeemer of Israel. Then, from among the enlightened nation of Israel, God will add a sizeable number to his already believing remnant of that nation.

The apostle Paul begins to address this subject in chapter 11 of Romans.





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## Romans Chapter 11

### Has God Rejected Israel?

#### **Romans 11:1-10**

At the beginning of chapter 10, the apostle Paul had expressed his deep and sincere desire for Israel's salvation. Paul acknowledged that Israel had a zeal for God. However, the apostle pointed out the fact that they did not base their zeal on knowledge or on a correct understanding of God's truth as he had revealed it. Contrary to God's revelation in the Scriptures and through his Son, the Jewish people sought to establish their own righteousness. They pursued this course fervently instead of accepting the free gift of righteousness that God provides to everyone who believes on his Son.

Thus, because of Israel's rejection of God's Son and of his gift of righteousness, the Jews had cut themselves off from the one and only way of salvation. Because, too, of their unbelief and hardness of heart, God had set them aside as his people—with the exception of a relatively small number who had believed in the Lord Jesus and who had become his followers. However, the fact that God had set aside his people did not mean that he had finally rejected his people. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 11, the apostle Paul writes:

#### **Romans 11:1**

To the question, *Did God reject his people?* the apostle Paul answers with an emphatic No! Not by any means! To demonstrate that God had not rejected Israel finally or totally, Paul reminds his hearers or readers that he himself is a Jew by race. He is an Israelite. He is a descendant of Abraham. This was the lineage so greatly cherished by the Jewish people since Abraham was called by God, since God called him his friend, and since the LORD God made his covenant with Abraham and with his descendants after him.

In addition to his biological descent from Abraham, the apostle Paul can also claim direct descent from the tribe of Benjamin. Moreover, when following his former way of life according to the Jewish religion, Paul belonged to the strictest sect of that faith, viz. the Pharisees.

The fact that—by God's grace—Paul was now a Christian in the service of the Lord Jesus proved beyond all shadow of a doubt that God still concerns himself with the Jewish people. Again, it proves irrefutably that God still brings some of these Jewish people to a saving knowledge of his Son. Furthermore, many of the other apostles and followers of the Lord Jesus belonged to the Israelite nation. These included many of the women who followed Jesus and of course his own mother, Mary. In addition, very many subsequent converts to Christ in the days of the early church belonged to the Jewish people.

These examples serve to illustrate that God has not abandoned Israel either finally or totally. This, of course, has been the situation with many succeeding generations of Jewish people. Even during its times of greatest apostasy and defection from the truth, God has always reserved for himself a remnant of faithful believers from among that nation.

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To this end, the apostle Paul writes in verses 2 and 3:

### **Romans 11:2-3**

(See 1 Kings 19:10,14)

*God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew... (v.2a NIV)*

Speaking of the election of Israel, the apostle Paul remarks that God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (v.29). Those whom God foreknew are those whom God has chosen for a purpose and predestined unto eternal life. In accordance with his word, God must and will fulfil his purposes for Israel, despite their continuing obstinacy and unbelief. This does not mean that God will yet save the entire nation of Israel. However, it does mean that God will yet save every one of those whom he foreknew and has predestined from eternity. This could amount to a very considerable proportion of the Jewish nation.

In his epistles, Paul uses the expression *Don't you know...?* to refer to matters of some importance and of which his hearers or readers ought to be aware. In verse 2 above, the apostle uses this expression in calling upon his hearers or reader's knowledge of the OT Scriptures. In particular, Paul adverts to their assumed knowledge of the incident involving Elijah when the prophet of God believed himself to be the only remaining servant of God in the land. The people of Israel hated to hear God's voice ringing in their ears through the message of the holy prophets. Israel hated to have its sins exposed and condemned. They did not want to acknowledge their sins to God or to seek the Lord's mercy; even although God promised to be gracious to all who called upon his name in true repentance.

In a futile attempt to silence the voice of God that was resounding so clearly in their consciences, the Israelites demolished the sites where God was worshipped. They also killed many of God's faithful prophets. Now, they sought the prophet Elijah, that they might put him to death as well.

In desperation, Elijah called out to God. The embattled prophet pleaded to God for his deliverance. At the same time, Elijah earnestly imagined that he was the only remaining true believer in the land of Israel. In this matter, however, Elijah was greatly mistaken. The prophet was not alone in the land. God had reserved for himself seven thousand true believers who refused to acknowledge or worship Baal. This seven thousand constituted God's remnant, and he would protect them by his almighty hand.

Perhaps it was by the faithful preaching of God's holy prophets that this remnant had been strengthened in the grace of God and encouraged to stand firm in their faith. Certainly, these true believers needed much of God's grace and his Word in order to sustain them in such times of adversity and national apostasy. At any event, God had preserved for himself seven thousand men, women and children from among a sinful, rebellious and ungodly nation. This demonstrates that the Lord always reserves a remnant of true and faithful believers even when a church or a nation lies in a state of rebellion and sin. In the case of an unrepentant church, however, God may eventually remove its light of witness or remove his remnant from that particular fellowship to another place of worship.

Concerning the fact that, in Elijah's time, God had reserved a people for himself, Paul writes in verse 4:

### **Romans 11:4**

(See 1 Kings 19:18)

Grave as the moral and spiritual situation in the land of Israel had become, God had certainly not abandoned his faithful remnant, or they him. By his grace and through their faith, God had kept the faithful seven thousand souls from the general apostasy in the land. He

had protected and delivered his own true people from among those who—outwardly at least—professed God's name. The Lord, however, knows those who are his; and on this occasion—as on many others throughout history—the Lord had separated the chaff from the wheat; the false professors from the true people of God.

In the midst of this great defection from the faith, then, Elijah did not stand alone. God had preserved for himself a remnant. So it was in Paul's day. God had not rejected the entire Israelite people (although he had set aside the body of the nation). Rather, the Lord God had preserved for himself a sizeable remnant of faithful believers from among the Jewish people. This included Paul himself, other apostles, and many other followers of the Lord Jesus. In verse 5, Paul confirms this by writing:

#### **Romans 11:5**

Paul considers it very important for his hearers or readers to realise that the remnant whom God preserved for himself were not chosen because they were more righteous or more deserving of God's mercy than any others. God shows his mercy to whom he will. His choice is not based on a person's worth or merit but on his own sovereign will and pleasure and his own free and unmerited grace.

What was true of the Jewish remnant is true also of everyone else whom God's Spirit effectually calls to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. God calls them by his grace. He does not choose or call them according to their merit, worthiness, righteous acts or good deeds. God elects whom he will; and he does this purely by his grace. (Rom. 9:10-18) In verse 6, the apostle Paul emphasises this point when he writes:

#### **Romans 11:6**

We must remember that Paul is writing his epistles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Every word he writes is the word of the living God. In his letters, Paul expresses himself using his own style. Nevertheless, each of the apostle's letters is and remains inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are, therefore, the infallible words of God. These remarks, then, are not Paul's personal opinions or ideas. On the contrary, they are God's words to his people and they inerrantly teach the truth about God's ways and God's purposes.

In verse 6, therefore, Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, asserts that God saves and keeps his people by his grace alone. In relation to regeneration or justification, works have no place. As far as the believer in Christ is concerned, works or good deeds are the necessary outward fruit of a truly regenerated, cleansed and sanctified life. No 'unsaved' person however, can experience regeneration by works, but only by God's sovereign grace. If this were not so, contends Paul, grace would cease to be grace. God's salvation would no longer be a free gift. Rather, it would become something that a person has to earn—at least in part—by his or her works or actions.

Clearly, however, God does not accept a person's works or actions—even though well intentioned. The works or actions of every unregenerate person is polluted or contaminated by that person's unforgiven sin. Thus, they are wholly unacceptable to God both on this ground and on the grounds of the person's alienation from and enmity with God. Thus, no one's good works or good deeds can be acceptable to God until that person has been redeemed, cleansed and sanctified by the Spirit of God. From this, it is evident that no one can be saved unless God saves him or her. Thus, salvation is entirely of God's grace, to the total exclusion of anything that a person can do.

Israel's rejection of God's way of salvation and their insistence upon their own righteousness led ultimately to a spiritual insensitivity or hardening of their hearts to spiritual truths. Thus, in verses 7 and 8, the apostle Paul writes:

### Romans 11:7-8

(See Deut. 29:4; Isaiah 29:10)

Israel earnestly sought God's salvation—in *her own way*. Israel earnestly sought righteousness—provided that it was a righteousness for which they themselves had striven and earned. Thus, they believed, God would be pleased with their efforts. God, however, had already revealed in the Scriptures that sinful mankind's righteous efforts were totally unacceptable to him (Isa. 64:6). Thus, Israel did not obtain a righteous standing with God, since they refused the gift of righteousness that God offered to everyone who believed on his Son. The elect, however, *did* believe on God's Son. Therefore, God justified them and pronounced them righteous in his sight. This included a small remnant of believing Jews together with a much larger number of believing Gentiles.

Israel as whole, however, remained in a state of unbelief. They had hardened their hearts against God, against his method of salvation and against his Son. Now, God had hardened Israel's heart so that they could not comprehend or understand the truth. Spiritual blindness had set in. God had given them a mind with intelligence and will. However, they could not will to see the truth nor could they discover the truth by using their intellectual faculties or knowledge alone. God had dulled or stupefied their minds or made their minds insensitive to spiritual realities. Though they had eyes to read the Scriptures, the Scriptures now remained to them a closed book—almost completely incomprehensible to their unspiritual minds. Although they had ears to hear the word of God, the message of God's word now fell on deaf ears.

As further confirmation of Israel's spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, Paul cites the Psalmist David:

### Romans 11:9-10

(See Psalm 69:22-23)

Here, the psalmist is appealing to God to deliver him from his enemies and to punish them for their iniquitous behaviour. Now, Israel too had become God's enemy. This was the opposite condition enjoyed by their forefather Abraham, whom God knew as his friend.

The apostle Paul uses this passage to illustrate what happens to those who constantly refuse to hear the voice of God speaking in his word, and convicting them in their heart and conscience. By such attitudes and behaviour, people make themselves God's enemies. God then acts judicially to punish people for their sinful behaviour. Ultimately, God may give them over or abandon them to the sinful desires of their hearts and minds. This is because they have spread a table for themselves in the midst of evil and feasted their hearts and minds on wickedness. Therefore, in course of time, their evil desires and practices lead to their downfall, perhaps, by adversely affecting their faculties, their health or strength, or their position in life.

Yet, their eyes remain blinded so that they are unable (and unwilling if they were able) to see and respond to God's truth. Still their backs remain bent under a heavy load of unforgiven sin and guilt brought upon themselves by their own evil ways and as God's judicial punishment for their wickedness and rebellion against him.

Were it not for the grace of God in Christ Jesus, every one of these sinners would eventually perish in their evil ways and God would condemn them to a lost and dreadful eternity. Yet, God may still show mercy to whom he will. Even from among such sinful men and women, God may yet call forth many to be saved. No one, however, can presume upon the grace of God.

## Israel Will Yet Experience God's Mercy

### **Romans 11:11-36**

Does Israel's spiritual blindness imply, however, that God has cast aside this nation forever? Most certainly not! This would not accord with God's eternal purposes for his people or with his promises to faithful Abraham. Yet, God has set aside Israel temporarily because of her unbelief and sin and because of God's wider purposes for humanity. Thus, in verse 11, Paul enquires of Israel:

#### **Romans 11:11**

God laid a Stone in Zion—the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this Stone became to Israel a Rock of offence over which they stumbled in unbelief. Yet, although Israel has stumbled over this Stone and although God has set Israel aside because of her unbelief, the Lord has not finally forsaken Israel. Even so, because of Israel's unbelief and sin, God has made his salvation available to all nations. Now, anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved—Jew or Gentile.

God's purpose in making his salvation available to the Gentile nations was to call forth his elect from every nation under heaven and also to provoke Israel to envy. Thus, Israel would see that God blesses those—and only those—who believe on his Son, and that he imputes righteousness as a gift to everyone who embraces Christ as his or her Saviour and Lord.

Concerning Israel, the apostle Paul writes in verse 12:

#### **Romans 11:12**

Because of Israel's rejection of his Son, God has extended the riches of his matchless grace in salvation directly to the entire world of humankind. Now, anyone of any nation who repents and believes on the Son of God will be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ came firstly to his own people; but his own people rejected him. Thus, the vast riches of redemption that might have been theirs through Christ have passed to the Gentile nations: i.e. to everyone of any nation who believes on the Son of God.

God has bestowed these immeasurable blessings upon the whole believing world because Israel—his own people—rejected his plan of salvation. They refused wilfully to acknowledge God's Son as their promised Messiah. Yet, at a time determined by God, Israel will return to the Lord in large numbers. At that time, the Spirit of God will open their eyes and grant to them an understanding and contrite heart and a believing mind. Then, by God's grace, Israel will freely acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and as their long-awaited Messiah from God. Then, God will grant to every believing Jewish man, woman and child eternal salvation and a place in his kingdom.

Considering these momentous events, Paul exclaims that God will bestow much more blessing on the world at that time than he has done even now through the riches of salvation that are presently available to all nations.

The apostle Paul, of course, remained deeply concerned for the salvation of his own race. Thus, in verses 13 and 14, he writes:

#### **Romans 11:13-14**

In addressing the mainly Gentile believers at the churches of Galatia, Paul refers to himself as the apostle to the Gentiles (or, more accurately, *an* apostle to the Gentiles). God

had appointed Paul to take the gospel to the Gentile nations principally, just as the same Lord had appointed Peter to take the gospel to the Jewish people principally.

Paul emphasises the fact that he is not only a believer in Christ, but also a Jewish Christian whom God has honoured by appointing him to the apostolic office in the church. If God could convert this former enemy of his church to faith in Christ and use him for God's glory, then—by his grace—God can convert any other Jew to faith in Christ. Thus, by the example of God's grace in his life and by the gospel he now proclaimed, Paul hopes to be the instrument through which the Holy Spirit will arouse his own people to envy and draw them to Christ.

In verse 15, Paul continues:

### **Romans 11:15**

Israel's rejection of God's Son and God's temporary rejection of Israel has resulted in sinners from every nation on earth being reconciled to God through repentance and faith in Christ. How much greater blessing, then, will attend upon Israel's return to the Lord? What measure of blessing will God bestow on the world when, by his grace, this nation begins to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation?

It will be as life from the dead. It will be like a new spiritual awakening bestowed upon the nations; a reviving or quickening work of the Holy Spirit of God operating world-wide in almighty sovereign power.

Then, in verse 16, Paul writes:

### **Romans 11:16**

The word 'holy' can be used in a general or a moral sense. Basically, it means to set apart or sanctify, to consecrate (to God), or to cleanse and render pure. On many occasions, the word 'holy' is used in a general sense without moral connotations. For example, both the temple building and certain vessels within the temple were declared holy: i.e. they were set apart or consecrated to God. Since these instances refer to objects rather than people, no moral connotations attach directly to the meaning of the word 'holy'. The same may be said of a people or nation that God reserves for himself (e.g. Israel). The nation as such is set apart to God. However, this does not imply the salvation of every single individual within that nation, but only every one of those whom God calls.

In verse 16, the apostle Paul says that if the part of the dough offered to God as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch must be holy. This is taken from the OT offering of the firstfruits of various items or individuals to the Lord. If the first part of the offering is consecrated to God as holy, then the entire remaining offering must be considered as holy to the Lord; i.e. dedicated to his use or service.

The apostle seems to be implying that the Jewish nation is holy to God because of God's covenant with and promises to Abraham (the firstfruits of the nation). This does not imply the salvation of every Jewish person since Abraham's time, but only of those who remained faithful to God, as did Abraham. As the root of the nation, God set Abraham apart as holy. What was true of the root is true also of the branches. Every faithful and believing descendant of Abraham has been set apart by God as holy to himself.

This principle may extend wider to include the nation of Israel *per se*. Although, at present, the vast majority refuses to believe on Christ, yet—because of God's promises to Abraham—the Lord will yet show mercy to this nation. As such, this nation remains—potentially and actually—holy to the Lord in the sense that God has set it apart in order to fulfil his eternal purposes for her and to keep his covenant with Abraham. In this context,



however, the word 'holy' does not mean that Israel has been cleansed, sanctified or purified in God's sight—but only that she has been reserved or set apart. At this stage in Israel's history, the moral application does not apply.

Paul does not want the Gentile believers in the churches of Galatia to presume upon God's grace toward them or to exult in their acceptance by God, while Israel has been rejected. Thus, in verses 17 and 18, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 11:17-18**

Here, Paul uses an analogy from the world of nature. In this horticultural metaphor, the good or cultivated olive tree and branches represents Israel. The wild or uncultivated olive represents the Gentile nations. Throughout the Mediterranean, people highly valued the good olive tree and cultivated it for its useful produce. On the other hand, however, the wild olive tree—here representing the Gentiles—was of little practical use to anyone. People considered it as a worthless shrub.

In Paul's analogy, God has cut off some of the branches of the cultivated olive tree (Israel) because of their unbelief. Furthermore, the Lord has grafted onto the cultivated tree numerous shoots (believing Gentiles) from the wild olive. Now, these new shoots share in the nourishing sap from the olive root. That is, God has engrafted believing Gentiles into his true congregation (or church), of which Abraham and the patriarchs are the root. Thus, believing Gentiles now share in the root of God's people, together with a faithful and believing remnant of Israel.

The Gentile believers, therefore, do not have any valid reason for boasting over the Jews. God has saved the Gentiles by his grace; and he has extended this unmerited grace and mercy toward the Gentile nations because of Israel's unbelief and rejection of his Son. The believing Gentiles must remember, however, that it is not they who support the root, but the root that supports and nourishes them. The ancient congregation of God—Abraham and the patriarchs—remain the origin of nourishment and sustenance for the present-day church; for God gave his living Word, the Holy Scriptures, to the patriarchs, and it was from their descendants that the Saviour came. From this source, all believers receive spiritual life and nourishment. Thus, we depend on the root of God's church, not vice versa.

Paul supposes that someone may object to what he has just said concerning the Gentile believers' dependence on the root. Such a person may argue that God has finally abandoned Israel in favour of the believing Gentiles. To counter any such misapprehension, the apostle Paul writes in verses 19 to 21:

### **Romans 11:19-21**

*'Branches were broken off',* (or Israel as a whole was rejected), someone may say, so that I might be grafted in to God's good olive tree.'

Yes, Paul concedes. However, God broke off the cultivated olive branches from the root because they were dead branches; that is, spiritually, they were dead, unfaithful and unbelieving. Then, through your faith, God grafted you—a wild olive shoot—into his cultivated tree. If, however, Israel were to return to God in true repentance and genuine faith then God could certainly restore these natural branches to their original root. Again, just as God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you if you do not prove the genuineness of your faith in Christ.

To emphasise his point, the apostle continues in verse 22:

### Romans 11:22

We must not imagine that God is acting harshly, unfairly or unjustly toward Israel. Throughout their history, the Lord had bestowed upon Israel very many blessings and favours. Consistently, however, Israel had proved unfaithful to the Lord and disobedient to his word.

God endured his people's rebellion over many generations, disciplining them as their sins required, but never removing his love from them. Yet, Israel would not yield to the Lord or obey his will. Moreover, when God sent his Son—their Messiah—into the world, Israel despised and rejected him, as the prophets had foretold. Only after such consistent and wilful rebellion and unbelief did the Lord set Israel aside. Only then, did God act sternly toward them. Yet, from among this unfaithful people, God still preserved for himself a faithful and believing remnant.

The mainstream of Israel rejected the Son of God and treated God and his word with the utmost contempt. On the other hand, the formerly ungodly but believing Gentiles accepted the Son of God and embraced the message of God's Word. Thus, God treated these Gentile believers with kindness. Originally, they were not of his chosen people; but God chose them, called them, and granted them a place in his family as children and heirs.

Since God has shown such grace and mercy to those nations that did not belong to him originally, God expects every believer from among those Gentile nations to prove faithful to him. By God's grace, they will. However, were they ever to despise God's grace or kindness toward them, then the Lord would cut them off just as he cut off Israel. Those, however, whom the Lord has truly called, regenerated, justified and sanctified cannot despise or repudiate God's grace. Rather, by God's grace and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they must continue in their faith, persevering steadfastly until the day of final salvation.

Paul is anxious to show to the church in Rome, constituted mainly of Gentile Christians, that God has not finally abandoned Israel. Thus, in verse 23, the apostle writes:

### Romans 11:23

Israel remains alienated from God and from his love and blessings because of their persistent unbelief, hardness of heart and rejection of Christ as their Messiah. Nevertheless, if Israel were to repent and return to the Lord, then God would restore them to his favour and fellowship. He would engraft these broken branches back on to the olive tree.

One day, by God's grace and the Spirit's power, many in Israel will return to the Lord. Although now they do not believe on the Son of God, yet, then, they will call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and so find eternal redemption. Paul anticipates this momentous event in the life of Israel and will discuss it more fully shortly.

God cut Israel off from the root of the cultivated olive tree. Is it then possible for Israel to be re-engrafted into this tree and root? Paul assures his readers and hearers that it is. Thus, in verse 24, the apostle writes:

### Romans 11:24

Humanly speaking, the difficulty lay not so much with grafting Israel back into its original cultivated stock, but with grafting shoots from wild and uncultivated stock (the Gentiles) into the good, cultivated tree. In Paul's analogy, the Gentile believers were excised from the wild olive tree and—contrary to nature—engrafted into a cultivated olive tree. In the case of the believing Jews, however, God will merely be re-grafting the natural branches

back into their own tree—in accordance with nature. Thus, if God can do the greater (in including the Gentiles) he can certainly do the lesser (in including the Jews).

In practice, of course, this situation does not present itself. All things are equally possible to the Lord—all things, that is, that are consistent with God's holy, pure and righteous character. Although all things are possible to God, it is impossible for God to do wrong.



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## Romans Chapter 12

### Yielded to God

#### ***Romans 12:1-8***

At this point in his letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul turns from essential doctrine to the essential practical application of his teaching. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 12, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 12:1**

Paul is reflecting on everything that he has taught in the preceding chapters of this epistle. Much of what he has said has been of very real relevance to everyday life and conduct.

As an apostle, Paul could have commanded the believers at Rome to observe and apply these teachings to their daily lives. However, the apostle loves these believers dearly and he does not wish to use his God-given authority over the churches unnecessarily. Paul assumes that the believers at Rome are mature enough spiritually to recognise their responsibilities before God and to assume that—responsibility willingly. Thus, in verse 1 above, Paul does not command but urges or beseeches these believers to respond positively to God's grace and mercy toward them.

But in what way should they respond? The only response acceptable to God is the response of a willing heart and mind. It is the sacrifice of each believer's life to him. God requires—and we are obliged to surrender—our whole selves, in body and soul, to the control and service of the Lord. He redeemed our bodies. Therefore, we are not our own. Our bodies belong to God and they must be yielded to him as living sacrifices. This is well pleasing to God and to his Son for the abundant mercy displayed toward us.

In verse 2, Paul continues:

#### **Romans 12:2**

At one time, the believers at Rome lived according to the practices and values of the ungodly world around them. Now, however, the Lord has redeemed them and called them out of that situation. No longer were they to conform to worldly practices or observe worldly standards of behaviour. Now, they belonged wholly to the Lord, and as such, they were to pursue holiness of life. This involved consecrating or dedicating their lives to God and to his service, and practising good deeds toward their neighbours.

This, of course, also involved a mind-transforming process—a process brought about by the indwelling Holy Spirit. God had granted new life and newness of life to the believer. Now, the believer was to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in putting of the old nature and putting on the new nature. His life was to be characterised by the fruits of the Spirit and not by the desires of the sinful nature. (Gal. 5:16-23)

When a believer allowed the Spirit of God to cleanse and sanctify his mind, and when he was producing the fruit of the Spirit in his life, then that person would be qualified to discern, appreciate and follow God's will. Paul describes that will as good, pleasing and perfect, for, in every respect, obeying the will of God glorifies the name of God. It also brings great blessing to our souls and peace to our hearts and minds.

## **Gifts for God's Service**

When a believer truly humbles himself before the Lord and submits himself wholly to God, he will not think of himself more highly than he ought, nor will he consider himself superior to others. To ensure that this attitude prevails among the Roman Christians, Paul writes in verse 3:

### **Romans 12:3**

In his own personal life, Paul had experienced the abundant and enriching grace of God, both in relation to his conversion and in relation to his spiritual gifts and offices. Probably, the latter is in view here. Paul is addressing the believers at Rome as an apostle whom God, in his grace, has called to that office and has equipped with the necessary spiritual gifts. In this capacity, the apostle Paul exhorts the saints at Rome not to become proud or conceited. Rather, he encourages them to think sensibly and quietly of the great things that the Lord has done for them, and in that light, to humbly submit their lives to his loving and wise control.

God had granted to each one of these believers faith to believe on his Son and to continue walking with him from day to day. Now, according to the degree of faith they possessed, they were to apply the principles of their faith to their everyday lives—especially as it related to serving God humbly within his church. Love and gratitude toward God was to be matched with love and concern toward their fellow believers, and to their neighbours outside the church.

Paul is anxious to point out to these believers that God has placed each one in his church for a specific purpose and he has equipped him or her with specific gifts, talents or abilities. Thus, beginning in verses 4 and 5, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 12:4-5**

At this stage in his letter, Paul refers to principles he had already applied in his letter to the Corinthian church (see 1 Cor. chapters 12 and 14). Paul intends to demonstrate that the church of Christ is composed of many individual members, yet all the members comprise one body. Thus, since every member belongs to the same body, no single member can function independently of the other members. All the various members remain mutually dependent on one another.

Nor does every member possess the same function. The body consists of a variety of different but essential parts. Likewise the church—which is the body of Christ—comprises all the true people of God, each of whom occupy different parts in that body and each of whom possess distinctive gifts, talents or abilities. To this end, Paul writes in verse 6:

### **Romans 12:6**

In verse 3, Paul had referred to the grace that God had given to him; i.e., the gift and office of the apostleship. Now, says Paul, each one of us has received similar grace from God. Expressed differently, God has bestowed upon each one of us a specific spiritual gift. We should observe, however, that the Lord has not granted the same gift to everyone. On the contrary, he has apportioned various gifts among different members of his church. Everyone, however, possesses at least one valuable spiritual gift. Therefore, we must exercise our gift in the way that God intended, and in accordance with the measure of faith that he gave us.



Paul now begins to list some examples of spiritual gifts. Clearly, however, the apostle does not intend this list to be exhaustive, as the gifts mentioned do not comprehend all the gifts that the Holy Spirit imparts to the church.

The first gift that Paul mentions is that of prophesying. To 'prophesy' is to proclaim, reveal or make known the Word and will of God. Both the OT and the NT prophets of God spoke directly under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Like the apostles, therefore (who also spoke and wrote directly under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit), every word which the prophets of God uttered during the course of their messages was the word of God. The people, therefore, were required to accept and believe the holy prophet's words as the words and instructions of God himself.

A prophet's ministry, therefore, was mainly of a preaching and teaching nature. They differed, however, from the later NT (i.e. post apostolic) preaching and teaching offices. Those servants of God who followed the original apostles, and who possessed the gifts and offices of preaching and teaching, did not proclaim their message under the direct and infallible guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Every true servant of God seeks to remain faithful to the truth while preaching or teaching the Word. Even so, at times he can be in error, since God's Holy Spirit does not inspire him directly and inerrantly, as he did the prophets and apostles.

Another part of a prophet's ministry was to reveal to the people events that would take place in the future. Thus, God spoke to his people concerning good or evil, blessing or judgment. Many times, he warned through his prophets of coming judgment because of his people's sins and unfaithfulness. Many times, also the Lord called through the prophets for his people's repentance, promising them mercy if they returned to him with all their hearts. Now, however, that God's Word has been committed to writing, verbal or other revelations are no longer necessary. God has revealed everything that he wishes his people to know in his Word, the Bible—both concerning the present and concerning the future. Thus, the prophetic gift and office is no longer required.

(We must remember that anyone claiming to possess the prophetic gift today, or to be able to prophesy future events in this present age, must do so infallibly and inerrantly—as did the genuine prophets of the Scriptures.)

Thus, Paul infers, if a man possesses the gift of prophesy, let him use that gift to God's glory. Let him use it for the edification of the church in love, and in proportion of the degree of faith that God has imparted to him.

In verse 7, the apostle Paul speaks of two more gifts:

### **Romans 12:7**

Other spiritual gifts may not be as conspicuous as preaching or prophesying. Nevertheless, all are of equal value and are equally necessary for the good or wellbeing of the church. The church needs preachers to expound God's Word and to feed God's flock. However, it also needs people to serve within its fellowship in many other ways, thus meeting the needs of the fellowship as a whole.

To this end, Paul encourages those whom the Spirit has enabled has enabled to serve his church in some way to apply their gift to the benefit of others and to God's glory. Similarly, where the Holy Spirit has imparted the gift of teaching to certain individuals, then it is their responsibility to make the fullest possible use of God's gift to the benefit of his church and to his glory.

In verse 8, Paul adds more such gifts of God's grace:

### **Romans 12:8**

Many times, God's children stand in need of a word of encouragement or a message of hope. Within God's church, the Holy Spirit has bestowed the ability upon certain people to provide such words of encouragement and hope to their brothers and sisters in the Lord. Thus, these believers ought to minister God's gift to others whenever it is required. In this way, they are not only helping, strengthening and encouraging others in their faith and glorifying the Lord, but also they are bringing the Lord's blessing and encouragement upon their own souls.

From time to time, some of God's people may stand in need of practical or material support or assistance. The Lord has placed certain members of his church in such a position that—when the need arises—they are able to provide such assistance. Thus, out of the blessing that they have received from the Lord, they ought to contribute to the needs of the saints. Again, they ought to do this willingly, as unto the Lord. For, although they may be lacking basic necessities, the poor saints are precious in God's eyes. Those, thus, who lend or give to the poor, lend or give of their resources to the Lord. (Prov. 19:17; James 2:5,14-17)

To others within God's church, the Holy Spirit has granted the gift of leadership. This gift carries great responsibilities. Once again, those in positions of leadership within the church ought to acknowledge that they are acting as God's servants, and that God has appointed them through his church to guide and discipline his flock. Yet, as Peter infers, they must not do so harshly or inconsiderately, but always in great humility and with deep love, compassion and understanding for their brothers and sisters in the Lord. (1 Peter 5:1-4) Again, in all their duties and responsibilities, leaders must remain faithful to God as they guide his people. They must also be diligent in the application of God's Word to their own souls and to the life of the church.

Finally, Paul mentions those to whom the Holy Spirit has imparted the gift of showing mercy. Of course, every child of God ought to show mercy to others whenever this is required. However, some of God's people were particularly able to demonstrate a merciful spirit and to give real hope and encouragement to those who sought for such assistance. Thus, Paul encourages those who possess this gift to apply it in order to strengthen God's church and to give hope to those who stood in need of mercy, love, compassion and understanding.

The spiritual gifts mentioned in the above passage represent just a few of the gifts that the Spirit imparts to God's people. Each of these gifts is priceless in the eyes of the Lord. Because of their potential for good, their value is beyond measure. Thus, we can see that gifts that sometimes we consider less valuable, less important, or even insignificant, are in fact not so. Some of the lesser-noticed gifts are among the most needed in God's church. Therefore, whatever gift a person possesses, he ought to thank and glorify God for imparting that gift to him or her. From this, it follows that he or she ought to use their spiritual gift as God intended, and for the benefit of his church.

This is the message that the apostle Paul endeavours to convey to the believers at Rome.

### **Spiritual and Practical Love**

#### ***Romans 12:9-21***

Paul has encouraged the Christians at Rome to utilise to the full the gifts that God has given them. However, as Paul declares in his letter to the Galatians, the fruit of the Spirit is of paramount importance in each believer's life. Without this fruit, spiritual gifts are of no real value. Indeed, if used apart from the fruit of the Spirit, they may even prove divisive or otherwise harmful to the church.

The most important fruit of God's Holy Spirit is love. This love, however, is spiritual love. It derives from God's eternal love for his Son and his everlasting love for the world and especially for his people. Spiritual love is much higher than any form of human love—important as these are. Spiritual love is the love that God's Holy Spirit spreads abroad in the believer's heart when he has been justified and reconciled to God through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice. Therefore, this love is pure, holy, true and faithful. To this end, the apostle Paul says in verse 9:

### **Romans 12:9**

To love is to care. It is to show compassion and concern toward others. It is to assist others in a variety of spiritual and practical ways. It is to uphold them, to strengthen them, and to encourage them. It is to pray with them and for them. It is to share with them and to stand by them in their time of need. Ultimately, love is to protect someone with our own lives; and, if necessary, to sacrifice our lives to preserve theirs.

This, essentially, typifies spiritual love; although some of these elements also may be found in pure human love—as when a mother is prepared to sacrifice her life for her child. In addition, however, spiritual love must be completely sincere and genuine. It must be free from the slightest trace of selfishness or insincerity.

Paul then says to these Roman believers that they are to hate what is evil and cling to what is good. Those who profess to know the Lord must not only abandon evil practises, but they must turn away completely from every form and source of evil. It may not be possible to exclude ourselves totally from the evil around us, and Paul is not suggesting that the believer should isolate himself or herself from the world. This would be contrary to the teaching and practise of the Lord Jesus himself and of his apostles. However, Paul is instructing the Lord's people to forsake evil in their personal lives and to avoid any places, people or things that they know would lead them into obvious temptation.

Thus, instead of pursuing the desires and practises of their old sinful nature, the children of God are to pursue—and cling to—everything that is good. This means everything that is morally good or righteous, and that is honouring and pleasing to the Lord. True blessing comes only through the pursuit of goodness and righteousness. When a person cherishes wickedness in his heart, and practises it, his conscience will accuse him and deny him true peace of heart. Furthermore, those who practise evil while professing to know the Lord are denying by their actions the very faith they profess. At the very least, they are leaving themselves wide open to God's hand of judgment or punitive discipline. Thus, declares Paul, *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good*. This alone is the way of righteousness and blessing. This way alone brings rest to the soul, peace to the mind, and repose to the conscience.

In verse 10, Paul continues by writing:

### **Romans 12:10**

In verse 9, Paul had said that love must be sincere or free from all impure or selfish motives. In this manner, the believer was to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Similarly, he was to love his neighbour as himself. (Mark 12:28-31) Now, in verse 10, Paul speaks of directing this love toward fellow believers. It was not sufficient to treat one another merely as friends. Rather, Paul declares that believers are to be devoted to one another. They are to treat one another as real brothers and sisters to whom they are inseparably united through a common faith and a common redemption. Therefore, they were to love one another with a brotherly love (Gk. *philadelphos*); that is, with the whole of their being, and with a genuine willingness to do anything in their power to

## Expository Notes

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assist the one they loved. How very different this is from the world's usual perception of love!

Paul adds that the believers at Rome—as everywhere else—were to honour one another. Among the people of God, pride, arrogance, and pretensions to superiority should not be found. Those who truly loved their brothers and sisters in Christ would always consider the interests of their fellow believers before and above their own. Humility would be their hallmark. Humility, too, would be the strength of their character. This is where true love and friendship lies, and there alone can true devotion and faithfulness be found.

In verse 11, Paul continues by saying:

### **Romans 12:11**

Regardless of setbacks, trials or difficulties, do not give up. Keep going on in your faith and in your work for the Lord. Complete what you have begun. This you will surely do through faith, through steadfast endurance, and God's strength and power in your life. Be zealous for the Lord and for the truth always. Let the Spirit sanctify and empower your words and your deeds. Thus, in everything you say and do, God's name will be honoured and glorified. In this way, you will be serving the Lord with all your heart and soul.

Then, in verse 12, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 12:12**

Do not become discouraged or disheartened in the face of opposition, trials or adversity. Rather, rejoice in the Lord always. (Phil. 4:4) Rejoice, or be joyful, in the hope that you have in Christ Jesus. For this hope guarantees your eternal salvation, to the glory of God. (Rom. 5:2; Heb. 6:18-20)

Be patient in affliction. Remember that the Lord sometimes sends trials or afflictions into our lives to test us, to strengthen us, and to equip us for further service. Afflictions of this nature tend to purge our souls from dross and impurities, and cause us to seek closer fellowship—with God. At such times, however, we must recognise God's hand at work in our lives and not permit doubt or satanic suggestions to infer that God has abandoned us in our time of need. God never abandons those whom he loves and whom he has redeemed by the precious blood of his one and only Son. Rather, God trains, disciplines or chastises his children because he loves them, and because he has pledged never to leave them nor forsake them. (Psalm 89:30-33; Heb. 12:5-11)

In view of these things, we ought to prove faithful to God in prayer, Paul says in verse 12. Our heavenly Father has pledged that—for the sake of his Son—he will remain faithful to us. We therefore ought to call upon in prayer daily and hourly, to praise, glorify and honour his holy name, and to present our requests and petitions to him through Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit interprets everything we say, together with the inexpressible thoughts of our hearts, and presents our prayers to God. Thus, when we fellowship with God regularly in prayer, the joy of the Lord will fill our soul.

In verse 13, Paul writes:

### **Romans 12:13**

We ought never to ignore the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we are in a position to help a fellow believer, then we ought to assist that person where we can. Again, God's people should be noted for showing hospitality to others, whether they be friends or strangers in the Lord. Those who entertain and provide for others are serving

the Lord and providing for him. These are just some of the ways in which love proves itself as sincere or genuine.

Paul has just spoken of our attitude toward God and toward our fellow believer. In the above passage, the apostle emphasised the necessity of practical and sincere love. Now, beginning at verse 14, Paul speaks of our attitude toward our neighbours more generally. Here, too, the believer must ensure that love remains paramount.

In verse 14, the apostle writes:

**Romans 12:14**

Paul knew the failings of human nature, even in the regenerate children of God. He knew of a person's natural inclination to seek redress for wrongdoing. Yet, the apostle enjoins the believers at Rome not to think evil of those who oppose them or who seek to harm them. On the contrary, those who belong to Christ should pray for the mercy and the blessing of the Lord upon their persecutors. However, they must do so from a heart that is genuinely concerned for their persecutor's spiritual welfare, and that truly desires God to show mercy and grace toward them.

This is practical love demonstrated toward our enemies or toward those who oppose the gospel message. Such love is far more powerful and potentially much more effective than retaliation with a curse or by threatening our enemies with God's judgment. God himself will be the Judge—of us all. We must bless those who oppose us and pray for them from a sincere heart. Let us remember that, at one time, we too were God's enemies, alienated from him by our evil thoughts and behaviour. Yet, God showed mercy to us. (Col. 1:21-22)

Then, in verse 15, Paul writes:

**Romans 12:15**

We are to share in the joys and griefs of one another, whether with other Christians or with non-Christians. The Lord does not want his people to remain aloof from their neighbour. Where their neighbour has found cause for rejoicing, the believer is to share with them in that rejoicing; as, for example, the addition of a new baby to a family. We cannot share in rejoicing, of course, where any form of wrongdoing is involved; but, with this proviso, the believer ought to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Paul also says to the Roman believers that they are to mourn with those who mourn. This is one of the times when our friends or neighbours most need loving sympathy, concern and understanding. The people of God are the most able to offer spiritual comfort, counsel and support to those who grieve.

We must exercise discretion, however, in determining when to speak and when to remain silent. (Let us remember Job's experience of intense grief and suffering, and learn from the mistakes made by his friends when they tried to comfort him inappropriately.) Very often, a person's presence alone is sufficient in times of sorrow, even although little or nothing is said at certain times. Again, it may not always be necessary to be present physically, as long as our friend or neighbour knows that they can call upon us at any time for help or assistance. However, we must not forget our neighbour after the first few weeks or months. The grieving process, and the sense of loss, will probably continue for some considerable time. Therefore, our neighbour may need our support and understanding well into the future.

In verse 16, the apostle continues by writing:

### Romans 12:16

As far as possible, God's holy people ought to live at peace with their neighbours. Strife, dissension and disagreement are to be avoided by all means possible. These things are not conducive to a Christian's profession of faith, to holiness of life, or to their spiritual wellbeing more generally. Thus, God's Word enjoins us to seek peace and to pursue it. (1 Pet. 3:8-16)

We must do all in our power to prevent disputes, or to resolve them speedily when they arise. Our aim at all times must be to live in peace and harmony. This is very different from the attitudes and practices of the world. Yet, this gives the believer no reason to become proud on the grounds of either self-restraint or any other grounds. On the contrary, God's people should show humility—for therein lies true strength of character.

The child of God should be willing—as Christ was—to associate with people of low position, as well as with people in any other kind of position. The Lord Jesus associated himself with outcasts and 'sinners'. So must we. The Lord of glory associate himself with the poor and needy. So must we.

Yet, although we must emulate the Lord Jesus in these ways, we must not neglect other members of society. The Lord Jesus also brought his teaching to the leaders and rulers of the land—both civil and religious. He presented his claims to soldiers and military officials. In all humility, we too must witness for Christ wherever he places us, and we must present the message of the gospel to all levels of society.

Yet, as Paul declares to the Roman believers, we must be careful not to allow conceit or pride to infect our spiritual lives. In God's sight, sinful pride and conceit are detestable. Everything we are and have comes to us from the hand of the Lord. They are his gifts to us, bestowed upon us out of his own sovereign grace. Let us, therefore, do our utmost to show humility, love and concern to everyone with whom we come in contact.

Still concerning himself with how the believer can show practical love to others, Paul writes in verse 17:

### Romans 12:17

When he or she is wronged in some way, a Christian ought not to retaliate. A believer may feel a strong sense of injustice or even outrage. From a sense of righteous indignation, the child of God may desire to seek redress for wrongs done to them. Nevertheless, we must not do so if that means returning evil for evil. Rather, we must suffer the wrong, knowing that God is aware of the truth and that in due course he will vindicate his children. (1 Peter 4:12-19)

Therefore, says Paul to the believers at Rome, *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody*. Do not provide anyone with an excuse for criticising your attitude or behaviour toward others. Do not give them an opportunity for accusing you of treating them as they have treated you. On the contrary, show by your good behaviour that you have no intention of returning evil for evil. Rather, you are trusting God to vindicate you. At the same time, however, we must demonstrate genuine concern for those who have wronged us by praying for them sincerely and by seeking to do them good. (vv.20-21; 1 Peter 3:8-17)

In verse 18, Paul continues by saying:

### Romans 12:18

Paul recognises that it is not always in our power to avoid strife or disagreement. However,

the believer ought not to be the instigator of trouble. Indeed, as far as it is in his power to do so, he is to live in peace and harmony with other people.

We should note, however, that Paul is not implying that—in order to maintain complete peace and harmony—we should be willing to compromise our faith or principles. Nor should we be willing to sacrifice the truths of the gospel or of the Word of God more generally for the sake of maintaining peace. We must defend our faith and maintain the truth of God's Word regardless of the opposition or hostility this may invite. Nevertheless, we must do so from a heart of love and compassion and in a spirit of humility toward those who oppose the message of eternal salvation. (2 Tim. 2:23-26; 4:1-2; Titus 1:9; 2:1)

### **Vengeance is Mine**

In verse 19, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 12:19**

{Cf. Deut. 32:35}

Sometimes, a believer may be sorely tempted to seek revenge for wrongs done to him or her, especially when these wrongs have been inflicted with gross unfairness or injustice. Nevertheless, Paul appeals to the dear children of God at Rome not to avenge themselves. Rather, the apostle enjoins them to stand back from the situation and leave room for God's wrath.

This does not mean that God will inflict his wrath immediately on the wrongdoer. God will always allow space for repentance. Ultimately, however, the Judge of all the earth must do right. It is God's place to avenge. In justice and righteousness, therefore, the Lord will repay all those who remain impenitent to the end, according as their evil deeds deserve. God, therefore, will ensure that justice and righteousness prevails. Ultimately, he will ensure that his children are vindicated of all charges levelled against them maliciously and slanderously. Meantime, the Lord expects his redeemed children to show kindness toward their enemies.

Thus, in verse 20, Paul continues by saying:

#### **Romans 12:20**

{Cf. Prov. 25:21-22}

Retaliation cannot effectively subdue our enemies, but love can. Once more, the apostle is speaking of spiritual and practical love or the good things that we can do to help someone—in this case, our enemies. If we know that someone who has wronged us is suffering from hunger or is short of other necessities, then we are to provide them with assistance. If we see someone who has injured us by their words or deeds suffering from thirst or some other basic need, we are to help meet that need. Thus, we fulfil the law of Christ to love one another and to love our enemies.

The effect of all this on our enemies is to heap burning coals on their head. This metaphor, which is taken from the Old Testament, usually indicates God's judgment on the ungodly and impenitent. The phrase is sometimes taken to mean, therefore, that—by showing love to our enemies—we are increasing their culpability before God and consequently their ultimate punishment should they fail to repent and seek God's mercy.

Again, however, this metaphor is sometimes understood to mean that—by showing love to our enemies—we will ultimately cause them intense pain in the form of an accusing

conscience, remorse and self-reproach. In this case, the burning coals would be the pains of their own making.

We must bear in mind, however, that—very often—such people have hardened their consciences and do not normally suffer from an accusing conscience. Similarly, remorse is not the same as repentance, and self-reproach may be no more than self-pity. Having said this, however, no-one is so hardened that God cannot melt their heart and bring them to repentance. This remains true unless—like Pharaoh—they harden themselves beyond the limit that God allows.

The usual interpretation of the phrase ‘to heap burning coals on his head’, relates to God’s just punishment of the persistently ungodly and wicked person, or of all those who remain finally impenitent. This meaning, or a variation of this meaning, would seem more appropriate to the present context.

Finally, in verse 21, the apostle Paul declares:

### **Romans 12:21**

If we consistently return evil for evil, then this demonstrates that we have been overcome by our old sinful nature. The flesh has gained the upper hand in our lives. By our actions, we have succeeded in subduing the Holy Spirit in our lives. This, however, implies that we are no longer walking in the Spirit, or living in close fellowship with God. Thus, if such a situation is to be avoided, it is essential that we do not even begin to return evil for evil. If we have done so already, we must repent before God and seek reconciliation, where possible, with those against whom we have retaliated.

To avoid such situations, says Paul, we are to make a practice of overcoming evil with good. On every occasion, as far as it is possible, we are to demonstrate the love of Christ, and provide assistance where necessary to, those who practise evil against us. This is indeed a challenge to us all. However, by God’s grace we will seek to do what we know is right.



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## Romans Chapter 13

### Submission to the Governing Authorities

#### **Romans 13:1-14**

We come now to chapter 13 of Paul's letter to the church at Rome. In the first part of this chapter, the apostle deals with the Christian's responsibility before God to submit to the rule of law and government. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 13, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 13:1**

This passage summarises very clearly the general teaching of God's Word regarding the place and power of the civil authorities. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. God is the Supreme Sovereign of the universe. He rules over all created beings and they remain subservient to him. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. All creation—mankind and angels, good and bad—is subject to Christ's sovereign rule.

In the civil realm, God has appointed governing authorities to maintain peace and to uphold law and order. The Lord God has delegated to these authorities the power and right to act on his behalf for the good of society as a whole. Their power or authority to act, therefore, derives from God. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul states in verse 1 that *everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities...* Effectively, when we submit ourselves to the government and to the laws of the land we are submitting ourselves to what God has instituted.

This, however, does not extend to the flagrant abuse of God-ordained government or to civil laws that God's Word expressly forbids us from obeying. Nevertheless, apart from such situations, the believer must be extremely careful to submit himself to rulers, judges, magistrates and other God-appointed authorities, and to obey every law of the government or its agents. Where, however, obedience to God's law must take precedence over a civil law, we must be prepared to suffer the consequences of being faithful to God and obeying his commands.

(Paul does not concern himself here with Christians who may find it necessary to support lawful combat. Such an occasion could arise when every other method has failed, and when it becomes necessary to protect or defend those who are being treated cruelly and mercilessly. This assumes the wilful and tyrannical abuse of the God-given authority to govern. The abuse of the civil population in such a case is condemned by God and will be judged by him most severely.)

In verse 2, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 13:2**

From what Paul has said already in verse 1, it is clear that to resist the governing authorities is to resist God. For God instituted those authorities. This means that the believer must submit to every lawful authority and to judges, magistrates and other agents of the government who implement the civil law or who deal—with those who transgress the law. Any rebellion against the government or against the civil institution and its laws is rebellion against God. (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

This principle applies to all forms of government, whether democratic, autocratic, military or otherwise. God's people must submit to all forms of lawful authority unless it would involve them in express or direct disobedience to the law of God. Then, God's law must take precedence over civil or military law. In such a case, however, the believer must be prepared to suffer the consequences of refusing to submit to a law that God's Word condemns. Yet, God will honour those who honour him. (Cf. 1 Sam. 2:30) Even so, the believer must be extremely careful to ensure that he takes his stance on solid ground, and that he has not misunderstood or misinterpreted the Word of God.

Those, however, who rebel against authority, will bring judgment on themselves. For God has appointed those authorities to rule and to administer justice. The latter involves acquitting the guiltless, and condemning and punishing the guilty.

(The reference in the KJV to 'damnation' does not refer to the final judgment but to the exercise of judgment or condemnation and punishment in the civil realm by lawfully appointed judges.)

In verse 3 and 4a, Paul continues:

### **Romans 13:3-4a**

Paul begins by saying that rulers hold no terror for those who do right. Clearly, then, the apostle is thinking of the normal and intended use of God's institution of government and not to vile or wicked abuses of that institution. This apart, and in whatever form of government God has ordained for a particular nation or ethnic group, rulers and justices cause no fear to the good but only to those who practise evil. Indeed, one of the reasons why God appointed them was in order to commend the good and to control and punish the evildoer.

As Paul notes at the beginning of verse 4, those authorities are God's servants. They are answerable to him for all their actions, or for the lack of them. Thus, when the believer submits to those authorities, he is submitting to the servants of God in the civil realm.

In verse 4b, Paul continues by saying:

### **Romans 13:4b**

Those who practise crime or any other form of wrongdoing have every reason to fear the civil authorities. God has appointed them to govern the land and to maintain law and order. Additionally, however, God has invested those authorities with 'the power of the sword': that is, the right, power and authority to carry out various forms of just punishment on wrongdoers. Therefore, when the civil authorities administer such punishment, they are acting as God's servants for the good of the offender and for the good of society as a whole.

In verse 5, the apostle writes:

### **Romans 13:5**

As believers, we ought to be concerned at all times to yield to God's will. It is God's will that we submit to lawfully instituted authority. In the church, this means that we must recognise that ministers, elders and deacons are the servants of God to whom we must submit as unto the Lord.

Similarly, in the civil realm, this means that we must recognise that government officials, justices and other officers of the law are the servants of God to whom we must submit as unto the Lord. Thus, we are submitting to the civil authorities not merely because of pos-

sible punishment but principally because of conscience. Our conscience tells us that to submit to God-appointed authority is to submit to God, and that to rebel against that authority is to rebel against what God has instituted. (1 Peter 3:14-16)

Paul now moves from the God-ordained institution of government to the means of supporting that institution and its officers. Thus, in verse 6, the apostle writes:

**Romans 13:6**

The government levies taxes to fund the various offices and departments for which it is responsible. Additionally, taxes are necessary to support the government officers and other government employees such as civil servants. In the case of chief officers or ministers of the government, they are God's servants who work full time, administering and applying the government's laws and decrees. These government officers or ministers are therefore entitled to receive their support from part of the tax revenues collected by the authorities from the people. (Matt. 22:17-21)

Thus, in verse 7, Paul continues:

**Romans 13:7**

Paul enjoins the believers at Rome to assume their full duties and responsibilities as citizens of that empire. Perhaps, for one reason or another, some of the believers felt reluctant at times to consider themselves under obligation to Rome or to its government. Nevertheless, they were living in that city, under Roman law and Roman authority. The believers, therefore, remained duty bound to honour that authority. This is because the authority itself (as distinct from its abuses) had been instituted by God.

Thus, Paul says (v.7), *Give everyone what you owe him...* Those who owed taxes were to pay their taxes. God expects every believer to assume his civic duties and responsibilities including the payment of taxes levied by the government or by a local government authority.

Paul then speaks of paying revenue where revenue is due. Revenue relates to other forms of taxation, usually indirect. This would include taxes deducted from wages or salaries, duties paid to customs and excise, and other similar forms of revenue. These, too, were to be paid willingly by the believer, since they were being paid to an institution that God had ordained for the good of society.

Paul then mentions paying respect to whom respect was due. This may be the respect due to the highest government authorities, from the Prime Minister, President, or other chief official, down to the members of the government. In all cases, these are God's servants and were to be respected as such.

We should note, however, that this respect is due to the office itself, and to the officer or minister who lawfully carries out the duties and responsibilities of that office. It does not relate to the character or conduct of the person who holds that office. Many evil, immoral and corrupt individuals have held government office, and God will surely judge them for their wickedness. Nevertheless, the believer is not being required to respect that person's character or conduct, but to respect the office that he occupies and to respect his position as a government official. The office has been instituted by God. That office will remain, and will be filled by others, long after God has removed unfaithful and unworthy government servants.

Finally, the apostle Paul says that the believer is to give honour where honour is due. Elsewhere, the Scripture says that we are to honour all men (i.e. all humanity). We are to treat one another as equals, for that is what we are in the eyes of the Lord. Individuals

may hold different ranks, stations, offices or positions in life. Nevertheless, as individuals, God considers everyone as an equal.

(We are speaking here of the equality of all individuals *as people*. God, however, has appointed different *positions* for each person to occupy. Many of these positions include the concept of submission to authority. For example, Paul states at the beginning of this chapter, that the believer must submit to the governing authorities. Likewise, an employee submits to his or her employer; a wife submits to her husband as her head, and children submit to their parents.

In every case, however, submission relates to a person's *position* (in relation to government, in relation to employment, or in relation to the family, etc.). In none of these cases, or in any other case relative to mankind, does submission imply inequality. Nor does it relate to a person's character, gifts or abilities. As a *person*, everyone remains equal in God's sight. This applies whether they are well known or unknown, rich or poor, and regardless of nationality or sociality distinction. This, of course, means that everyone will be judged equally, justly and fairly.

Thus, we are to honour the institution of government and we are to honour the people whom that government serves.

### The Unending Debt of Love

Paul, therefore, concludes that the believer should respect and honour those in authority, and that they should be indebted to no one. There is, however, one debt that the believer will continue to owe, and that is to love other people. Regarding this matter, the apostle writes in verse 8:

#### Romans 13:8

A continuing obligation rests on the shoulders of every believer to show love to his or her fellow men and women. The Scriptures exhort God's people to love one another deeply, as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and in all purity. However, in this passage, the apostle Paul is extending this concept to include love for all human beings, regardless of their circumstances, colour or creed.

This is in line with the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Jesus spoke of love for God as being of first importance, followed by love for one's neighbour. When questioned on another occasion about who was one's neighbour, the Lord used the illustration of the Good Samaritan (remembering that many Jews despised Samaritans). Here, however, a Samaritan willingly assists a Jewish person in distress. Thus, the Lord Jesus demonstrates that our neighbour is someone who stands in need of help or assistance. The Lord requires, and love demands, that we assist such a person, regardless of their nationality, colour or religion. (Luke 10:29-37)

Thus, concludes Paul, those who help such a person in his or her need is demonstrating their love for that person. Of course, the debt to love other people will always remain outstanding in this life, as there will always be someone somewhere who stands in need of our love, comfort and practical help.

In verse 9, Paul continues by saying:

#### Romans 13:9

{Cf. Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deut. 5:17-19,21 and Lev. 19:18}

Here, the apostle Paul is alluding directly to the teaching of the Lord Jesus in passages such as Matthew chapter 22 verses 36-40.

Those who love other people do not harm other people, or anything that belongs to them. Thus, they cannot violate another person or their partner by committing adultery with that person's husband or wife. They cannot violate the image of God in another person by assaulting or murdering them. They cannot violate another person's home, property or personal possessions by defrauding them of their possessions or by otherwise stealing from them. They cannot envy their neighbour's possessions or position in life, nor can they covet anything else or anyone that belongs to their neighbour.

Love does not transgress any of these commands or any other commands. Rather, love keeps these commands; and, by keeping them, we honour God and we love our fellow human beings as ourselves. Love, therefore, is the fulfilling of God's holy law. This is precisely what the apostle Paul states in verse 10:

**Romans 13:10**

This summarises what has already been said above. If we love our fellow human beings, then we cannot wrong them in any way. Rather, our love for them will compel us to do good to them and for them whenever this is possible. This love alone constitutes a Christian's continuing debt to his own wider community and to humanity as a whole. (Cf. Gal. 6:2)

**Living in the Light**

In the next part of the passage, the apostle Paul assigns a motive for exercising submission toward those in authority and love toward our neighbour. Thus, in verse 11, Paul writes:

**Romans 13:11**

Paul exhorts the believers at Rome to take account of the present time. Neither the apostle nor the Roman believers (nor anyone else) knew when the Lord would return. However, they were to live as though the Lord's return was very near indeed. Granted, Paul's own epistles teach us that certain events must occur before the Lord Jesus comes again in his glory. Even so, believers were to conduct their lives in the world as though the Lord could return at any moment.

To this end, the apostle enjoins the believers to wake up from the slumber, or to lay aside any tendency toward laziness, apathy, carelessness or indifference in their spiritual lives. With the church of God everywhere, they were to be constantly alert and active in the things of the Lord. And the reason? Because their salvation—that is, the final phase of the salvation—was nearer now than when they first believed. (Eph. 5:14-20; 1 Thess. 5:6-10)

In verse 12, Paul continues:

**Romans 13:12**

Morally and spiritually, the people of the world are living in a dark age. The Christian, however, is no longer living in the darkness of sin, or he should not be. He or she anticipates that great Day when the Lord will appear or when he takes them into his immediate and glorious presence at the end of their lives on earth. Then, of course, the night will be completely over. The new eternal day will have dawned upon the believer's life and soul.

While living in this present world, however, Paul exhorts the children of God to put aside the deeds of darkness and to put on the armour of light. Christians must never practice sin in their lives. As the redeemed of the Lord, they must forsake sin, in thought, word and deed. They must protect themselves with the armour of light. The Word of God and the

Spirit of God protects the believer from the snares of the devil and equips the child of God to live a holy and godly life.

Thus, in verse 13, Paul writes:

### **Romans 13:13**

Here, Paul illustrates some of the deeds of darkness that Christians must avoid totally. Thus, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ must not attend orgies or wild partying of any kind. They must not engage in anything that might lead to intemperance, lack of self-restraint or loss of self-control. This means, for example, that they must not do anything that would result in a state of drunkenness or to any other similar condition adversely affecting the mind or body. Other similar conditions may include the abuse or misuse of drugs.

Again, God's redeemed children must exercise restraint in sexual matters. Sexual relations are God-given and are to be enjoyed only within the sacred bond and covenant of marriage. Sexual immorality, however, is a vile abuse of God's gift and of that natural, loving, sexual bond which forms one part of the marriage union. No child of God should ever engage in any form of sexual immorality. To do so, would be to defile, degrade and desecrate the temple of the Holy Spirit (our bodies). (1 Cor. 6:19-20) Having said this, however, although sexual immorality is a most serious sin and obnoxious to God, it is not the unforgivable sin. Those who truly repent of this sin and utterly renounce it will be forgiven and cleansed of all iniquity.

Those, however, who disregard God's command and who indulge consistently in sexual immorality, may find that this practice leads them eventually to debauchery. Debauchery is the unrestrained practice of sexual immorality. It reveals itself through a licentious or lewd character. When people reach this state and utterly refuse to acknowledge their sin to God or to repent of it, God gives them over to the practice of their sins and to the corruption of their minds and bodies. This, of course, includes the consequences of their sins on their lives. (Rom. 1:21-32)

These are the very evils that the Lord's people must utterly avoid.

Another sinful practice to be avoided completely is anything that leads to dissension or disharmony within the church of God. God's Word must be upheld in love and truth. However, unnecessary disagreements, disputes and strife among church members are destructive to the fellowship and must be avoided. Whenever a dispute or disagreement arises, it should be resolved speedily between the parties concerned or with the assistance of the church officers.

Similarly, attitudes such as envy or jealousy should find no place among the children of God. All that we are and all that we have comes to us from the Lord. Therefore, we should thank God for what he has been pleased to give us, and for what he has been pleased to withhold from us.

Similarly, we should thank God for what he has given to our brothers and sisters in Christ (although not necessarily to us). However, we must not envy or become jealous of our brothers and sisters because the Lord has given them blessings that he has withheld from us. God alone knows what is right and appropriate for each of his children. He always acts wisely, justly and fairly, and in accordance with his everlasting love and his eternal plans for each one of us.

Paul exhorts the believers at Rome to shun these evil practices and attitudes completely. (Eph. 4:22-25; 1 Pet. 2:1-2; James 1:21)

In verse 14, the apostle concludes:



**Romans 13:14**

God has already clothed us with the righteousness of Christ. It is this perfect righteousness that he sees in our character when he looks upon us as his regenerated, justified, adopted and sanctified children. Nevertheless, we are to ensure that this clothing is always kept tightly about us so that sin might not find an entry into our lives. We are to immerse ourselves in God, in his Word and in the things of the Spirit. Only by doing this constantly, will we avoid seeking gratification of the old sinful desires still within us. (Cf. Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:22)

Let us, therefore, set our minds on the things that are above. (Col. 3:1-2) Let us give free reign to the Holy Spirit to sanctify and cleanse us, and to lead us in the way that his holy, right and good. Let us submit, willingly and eagerly, to the Lord and to his Word. Then, and then only, will we know the peace of God reigning in our hearts and lives. This is the peace that comes from God above, and which transcends all human understanding and experience. (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:7)



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## Romans Chapter 14

### Freedom of Conscience

#### **Romans 14:1-12**

We come now to chapter 14 of Paul's letter to the Romans. In this chapter, the apostle warns the believers against criticising or judging those whose faith is weak. In particular, Paul cautions against disputes arising from matters of conscience.

In matters of *doctrine*—i.e. the teaching of God's Word, including the teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles—the truth had to be maintained (2 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 John 1:10). In matters of *indifference and conscience*, however, no one was to be refused church fellowship because of his or her opinions. On the contrary, even although their conscience prevented them from exercising the full Christian liberty, the church was to receive and welcome them as brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. To this end, Paul writes in verse 1 of chapter 14:

#### **Romans 14:1**

Paul encourages the believers at Rome to accept into their fellowship every child of God. This included those whose faith was weak in regard to what they could or could not do in non-essential matters. These people believed the essential truths of the gospel, and they accepted the fundamental doctrines of the faith. Their weakness in the faith, therefore, did not relate to essential matters of doctrine but only to matters of individual conscience and private judgment.

If such a person believed that certain actions were wrong, or at least doubtful, then he or she was not to participate in these actions. For whatever is not of faith is sin (v.23). Christian liberty—i.e. the liberty to act according to conscience in matters of indifference—afforded the believer complete freedom to honour the Lord according to his or her conscience.

A 'strong' Christian, of course, might have been more fully informed about some of these matters. Consequently, from his fuller understanding of God's Word and of the Lord's teaching, he may have no problems about doing certain things (provided these things were not wrong in themselves). However, since this was a matter of conscience and of private judgment, and not a matter of doctrine or principle, the stronger believer must not attempt to impose his or her convictions on a weaker brother or sister. On the contrary, the stronger believer was to respect the weaker believer's viewpoint. He was to welcome him as a fellow believer in Christ, and was not to pass judgment on matters that could be open to dispute. (Matt. 10:40-42; Rom. 15:7)

In verses 2 and 3, the apostle Paul continues:

#### **Romans 14:2-3**

One person's faith allows him to eat all kinds of food, including those that God formerly pronounced as 'unclean'. This person knows that the distinction between clean and unclean meats was abolished through the perfect work of Christ. Therefore, his faith and conscience regarding this matter allows him to eat any kind of food. (v.20; Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10:14-15)

Another person, however, may not (as yet) be convinced that all foods are clean. Indeed, lest he should mistakenly eat ceremonially unclean meat—or even worse, meat that had been previously offered in sacrifice to idols—he avoids eating meat altogether. In order to satisfy his conscience, this person confines his diet to vegetables. (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 8:10)

Paul says that the person who feels free to eat any kind of food must not criticise or belittle the one who does not. Nor should the person who adheres to a vegetarian diet find fault with those who do not. God has provided both meats and vegetables. Either or both are to be received with thanksgiving, for either or both are sanctified by God's Word and by prayer. (1 Tim. 4:5) Therefore, declares Paul, accept one another just as God has accepted each one of you, and respect each other's beliefs on such non-essential matters as food.

In the next verse, Paul challenges those who would pass judgment on their fellow believers because of what they eat or do not eat. Thus, in verse 4, the apostle asks:

### **Romans 14:4**

We are in no position to sit in judgment on someone else. To do so, would be to invite God's judgment (in this case, discipline) on ourselves. Furthermore, it is not our place to judge, condemn or criticise the servant of another person because of his or her private convictions. That person is answerable to his own master, not to us. In this case, of course, his Master is Christ; and Christ is both his Lord and ours. Therefore, we do well to honour our Lord and Master, and not to find fault with one another. (Matt. 7:1)

The weaker brother or sister, therefore, stands or falls to his own master, and that Master is Christ. Since, then, Christ upholds him by his grace and power, that person cannot possibly fall. He will stand, and stand before God—notwithstanding his weak faith and conscience in respect of certain foods.

In verse 5, Paul continues by saying:

### **Romans 14:5**

Paul now includes in his discussion the distinction that some believers at Rome and elsewhere were making between different religious days. All believers observed the Lord's Day or the First Day of the Week (Sunday) and they considered that day as sacred to the Lord. However, among some of the Jewish Christians were people who considered certain other days as equally special or sacred to the Lord. This included the weekly Jewish Sabbath (Saturday), the Passover, and some other Jewish religious festival or feast days. (Exodus 13:9)

Possibly, the Gentile Christians considered the Lord's Day more sacred than any others—if they regarded any others at all. It is possible also, however, that the Jewish believers considered that the Sabbath and the Jewish festival or feast days were just as sacred or special to the Lord as the Lord's Day itself. Hence, the Jewish Christians considered every (religious) day alike.

Paul does not attempt to resolve this issue one way or the other. This is a matter where each individual believer must act according to his or her own conscience and do what they believe to be right in God's sight. Thus, declares Paul, each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Cf. Col. 2:16-17) To this end, the apostle writes in verse 6:

**Romans 14:6**

Whatever we do, we do unto the Lord. He alone is Lord of our conscience, and we must be careful to satisfy our conscience before him. Thus, if a person considers only one day (the Lord's Day) as special, he must observe that day unto the Lord. However, if a person considers more than one day as special, he must observe each of those days to the Lord.

Clearly, apart from the Lord's Day, the Jewish religious festival days were abrogated by the finished work of Christ on earth. However, Paul is here considering the spiritual welfare of a weaker brother or sister. Since no point of essential doctrine is at stake, the apostle is advising the believers to act according to their consciences and to avoid offending one another. (Cf. Gal. 4:9-10)

The same principle applies to those who eat meats and to those who abstain. The person who eats meat does so with a clear conscience. He is fully convinced in his own mind that all foods are ceremonially clean, and that none of the meat he is eating has been previously offered to idols. Thus, he thanks God for the meat, and by his prayer, the meat is consecrated. (1 Tim. 4:3-5)

Similarly, the person who abstains from eating meat eats vegetables instead. He does so fully convinced in his own mind that he is not running the risk of eating 'ceremonial unclean' meat, nor of inadvertently eating meat that had been offered previously to idols. Thus, he thanks God for the vegetables, and by that prayer, the vegetables are consecrated. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. (Ps. 24:1) Whether, therefore, a person eats meat or vegetables (or both), the Lord has provided him with these things. Thus, the recipient offers thanksgiving to God for his abundant provision.

In verses 7 and 8, Paul continues:

**Romans 14:7-8**

We are not the masters of our own lives, so we are in no position to sit in judgment on other people or to criticise anyone for the apparent weakness of their faith. Our lives are not our own, and we do not or should not live them without regard to the one to whom they belong. Since, by redemption, our lives belong to Christ, he is our Lord and Master and to him we must give account of our lives. (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Thess. 5:10)

Even in death we die unto the Lord: i.e. we die to enter into eternal life in the presence of the Lord, there to serve, worship and glorify him. In life and death, therefore, we are the Lord's—and so is everyone who belongs to Christ. Thus, we cannot pass judgment on other believers, for they are not subject to our judgment but to the Lord's. Thus, Paul writes in verse 9:

**Romans 14:9**

Christ died to atone for our sins and to redeem a people for himself. Christ rose again to justify all who believe on him and to guarantee to them the gift of eternal life. Thus, all who belong to Christ know him as their Redeemer and Lord. He is their Lord in this life and—after the believer's death and resurrection—Christ will be their Lord in the life to come. Thus, Christ is Lord of both the dead and the living. (Rev. 14:13) Since, however, Christ is Lord of all, one believer ought not to lord it over other believers by judging or criticising them over matters of conscience. To this end, Paul writes in verse 10:

### **Romans 14:10**

Paul reminds the Roman believers, and us, of their position before God. It is true that God has justified them freely by his grace. Yet, it is also true that God will judge them according to their deeds. This judgment, of course, does not relate to the gift of salvation, but to a believer's works or fruit and to rewards or loss of reward. (Eccl. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:5)

Since, however, God will judge each believer at his judgment seat, we are in no position to pass judgment on our fellow believers. Nor are we in a position to look down on or deprecate our brother or sister in Christ because they abstain from certain things or because they consider certain days particularly sacred. God will assess and judge their motives as well as their deeds. We cannot. Indeed, by judging others, we risk condemning ourselves.

Paul, therefore, exhorts the church at Rome to leave all judgment on matters of conscience in the hands of the Lord. One day, he will judge us all. To this end, Paul writes in verses 11 and 12:

### **Romans 14:11-12**

{Cf. Isa. 49:18; 45:23; see also Phil. 2:10-11}

One day, all mankind will give account of themselves to God. No one will be able to make excuses or to plead mitigating circumstances, for God knows the truth. Thus, all mankind will fall down before the Lord God and every single individual will confess to God that his assessment of his or her life is just, true and righteous. Realising their state in the presence of Almighty God and of his Son, all humanity will remain utterly silent at this time. (Rom. 2:13; 3:19)

Paul, however, is not speaking of the judgment of the lost, although he is using a passage that includes this subject. Rather, in the present context, the apostle is using this passage to remind God's people that they too will one day stand before God's judgment seat; although, in their case, not to be condemned. The believer will stand before God to be judged for his deeds as a Christian. The Lord will reward him for his faithfulness in his service. Some believers, however, may possibly lose part or possibly all of their reward because of unfaithfulness to the Lord and to his service. Nevertheless, these unfaithful believers will not lose their salvation, since God has given this to them as a gift of his free and sovereign grace. (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

The Lord will judge every one of his children according to their thoughts, attitudes and actions. For this reason, none of his children are in a position to pass judgment on their fellow believers on matters of conscience; nor ought they to judge other believers on any matter not essential to salvation or holiness of life. (Matt. 12:36)

Even in matters essential to the faith, believers must be judged (i.e. disciplined and corrected) in love, with the Word of God, with much prayer, and with great compassion. Usually, this task falls to those who are spiritual—very often, the leaders of a local church. However, under no circumstance, ought such corrective discipline lead to dispute, disagreement or disharmony within the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:23-26)

## **Walk in Love**

### **Romans 14:13-23**

In verse 13, Paul writes:



**Romans 14:13**

In matters of conscience, no believer should sit in judgment on any other believer. Whether concerning meats, special religious days or festivals, or any other matter of this kind, God's children must determine for themselves what is appropriate in the eyes of the Lord. However, they must not expect other believers to agree necessarily with the decision that they make; although other believers ought to respect another person's views. The Word of God calls upon us to accept one another without engaging in disputes about such matters (v.1). Thus, we must do out utmost to avoid placing an obstacle in a weaker brother or sister's path.

In verse 14, the apostle Paul continues:

**Romans 14:14**

Paul had accepted fully the clear teaching of God's Word in relation to clean and unclean foods. Like the apostle Peter, Paul believed that God now declared all foods clean and therefore fit to eat, with thanksgiving. (Acts 10:9-15)

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul accepted that many believers had not yet reached his level of spiritual knowledge or maturity. The apostle understood that many of these 'weaker' believers felt uncomfortable about eating meats that formerly God had pronounced 'unclean'. Similarly, Paul understood a weaker believer's reservations about failing to observe religious days that formerly God had instituted.

The Lord Jesus Christ, of course, had fulfilled and abrogated the law of ceremonies with all its ordinances, rules and regulations. Many of the weaker believers, however, did not yet fully appreciate or understand just how far reaching was the work of Christ, although they believed wholeheartedly on the Lord Jesus for their salvation.

Thus, Paul infers that the 'stronger', more knowledgeable or spiritually mature believer must do all in his power to avoid giving offence. To this end, the apostle declares in verse 15:

**Romans 14:15**

If we love our fellow believers, we will never do anything that may hurt or offend them, or that may cause them unnecessary distress or anxiety. Rather, we will do everything in our power to help strengthen our brother or sister and to build them up in their most holy faith. This is one example of practical love.

If, however, we were to disregard our brother or sister's scruples over such matters, we would risk leading them into sin. Ultimately, this could lead to the ruin of their spiritual vitality and close communion with the Lord (although not to the loss of their salvation).

Such a believer may be tempted to emulate our example, even although by doing so he or she was acting against their own conscience. Thus, by doing something of which they doubted the propriety, and by wounding their conscience, they would be sinning against their conscience and against the Lord. (Rom. 14:23)

Should that person continue to disregard his conscience, he could ruin or destroy his life as a vibrant, confident and obedient believer, thus also forfeiting—at least temporarily—his close fellowship with God. In addition, however, he would forfeit his peace with God and the assurance of sins forgiven, that God by his Spirit provides to all who trust and obey.

Thus, Paul warns against disregarding the misgivings of one for whom Christ died. Thus, too, the apostle writes in verses 16-18:

### **Romans 14:16-18**

We may be perfectly convinced in our own heart, mind and conscience that certain matters are good and that no sin attaches to our use of them. Yet, since these are matters of conscience (and not of doctrine), we cannot impose our personal views—however strongly held—on other believers. Nor can we expect them to possess the same degree of spiritual knowledge or insight into such things as we may do.

Even although we may show them the truth from God's Word—as Paul must have done—a weaker brother or sister may not immediately see or understand the truth as we do. Thus, we ought not to let the things of which we approve and practise, be the means of a weaker brother or sister speaking evil of our conduct or beliefs. Rather, for the sake of their spiritual welfare, we ought to forego anything that we know might offend our fellow believer.

The real reason for this, of course, is that the kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, or of what special days we observe or do not observe. Indeed, God's kingdom is not a matter of rules, regulations and ceremonies at all. Rather, the kingdom of God consists in righteousness, peace and joy:

- *Righteousness*: God's kingdom consists in the righteousness that he has imputed to us and by which he has justified us. It consists in that perfect righteousness for which Christ lived, died and rose triumphantly. It consists too, in that righteousness which the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us through his work of sanctification.
- *Peace*: God's kingdom consists in peace. It consists in the peace that comes from God above and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the peace that we obtained from our justification in God's sight, and this is the deep sense of settled peace that the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts. (Rom. 5:1)
- *Joy*: God's kingdom consists in joy. This is the joy in the Lord our God in Jesus Christ his Son. He is the source of our joy, and it is by his Holy Spirit that we receive this and every other spiritual blessing, and it is by him too that we bear fruit for God.

Now, says Paul in verse 18, if we set our hearts and minds upon these things, then we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ and we are pleasing God. In addition, we gain the approval of good men and women everywhere. Furthermore, when righteousness, peace and joy reign supreme in our hearts, then our fellow believers will be blessed by our lives and encouraged in their own most precious faith.

To this end, the apostle Paul writes in verse 19:

### **Romans 14:19**

Instead of indulging our own self-desires and creating disharmony and disunity among the people of God, let us do everything that we can to maintain the unity of Christ's body, the church. Without compromising the fundamental truths of God's Word, yet being prepared to yield on non-essentials, let us pursue peace, harmony, and the mutual strengthening of God's holy church in love.

In verse 20, Paul continues:

**Romans 14:20**

The redeemed believer represents the work of God—for it is by his grace and mercy that God created that person anew in Christ Jesus. This is God's work, and we must be very careful not to harm or destroy that which God has created for himself.

We may harm, or even potentially destroy, our brother or sister's spiritual life by taking issue with them over matters of food or drink. By insisting on our right to consider all foods as clean or unpolluted by idols or anything else, we may offend a weaker brother or sister's conscience. However, should they be induced, by our example, to do what we are doing—against their own consciences—then we have led them into sin. Such sin could result in their spiritual downfall and the loss of their close fellowship with God (although not the loss of their salvation).

What may be true of food or drink may be true of anything else over which a weaker or less knowledgeable brother or sister has doubts. Thus, we must be very careful that the things of which we approve, do not cause another believer to fall. To this end, Paul writes in verse 21:

**Romans 14:21**

It is better by far that we abstain from certain interests or pleasures than to risk bringing about the spiritual ruin of a brother or sister for whom Christ died.

In verse 22 and 23, Paul reinforces this point by saying:

**Romans 14:22-23**

Our own hearts and minds may fully assure us that we can do certain things, and that no sin attaches to these things. Our conscience is clear. However, the conscience of another believer may be very far from clear concerning exactly the same matters. Thus, in such matters—that is, *matters of conscience*, not matters of doctrine—the stronger believer ought to bear with the scruples of the weaker believer. We ought not to do anything that may give unnecessary offence.

Thus, Paul says that the man who abstain from doing something for the sake of a weaker brother or sister, is truly happy or at peace with himself and with God. Instead of bringing God's displeasure upon himself by disregarding the conscience of a weaker believer, he brings the approval and blessing of God on himself.

In verse 23, Paul points out the danger for the weaker believer, should he follow another stronger believer's example. The weaker believer may have reservations, or even quite serious doubts, about the matter. Yet, he has just seen another, or perhaps several other, supposedly more spiritually mature believers doing things that he considers doubtful; in this case, eating of meats.

Thus, emboldened by the example of these other believers, the weaker believer decides to do the same. However, since he does so while still harbouring lingering doubts in his heart and mind, he is not acting from faith or from a clear conscience. On the contrary, his conscience is accusing him of wrongdoing and is robbing him of his peace with God.

Thus, it is evident that we must never do anything against our conscience or without complete faith in our actions and in our resultant position before God. This is the reason why Paul concludes this chapter by declaring:

*, ...everything that does not come from faith is sin... (v.23 NIV)*



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## Romans Chapter 15

### Accept One Another

#### **Romans 15:1-13**

One indication of true spiritual strength is to abstain willingly from certain freedoms that are ours in Christ, out of consideration for the spiritual and moral welfare of others. To give up our freedom to act in certain circumstances is not showing weakness or yielding for the sake of yielding. If we know that the exercise of our freedom in Christ might offend or harm our brother or sister morally or spiritually, then we demonstrate true strength of character by showing love and consideration for our fellow believer. To this end, Paul writes in verse 1 of chapter 15:

#### **Romans 15:1**

Paul tells the Roman believers that the strong among them ought to bear with the failings of the weak. We all have many failings of one kind or another. Although we may be strong in certain areas of our spiritual life, we ought to remember that—in other areas—we too have our weaknesses. Therefore, we ought to consider our less knowledgeable or weaker brother or sister as an equal in all respects, and not in some way inferior to us because of their qualms of conscience. By showing such love and consideration, we are no longer seeking to please ourselves but God, to whom both they and we belong and to whom both they and we are precious. Thus, Paul writes in verses 2 and 3:

#### **Romans 15:2-3**

{Cf. Psalm 69:9}

Our aim in regard to our fellow believer should be to help him or her in every way possible to grow in their faith and in holiness of life. This is what honours, pleases, and glorifies God.

Paul cites the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinless, perfect Son of God came into this world. As the Holy and Eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus could have exercised his sovereign rights over all mankind. He could have prevented mankind from maltreating him. He could have called upon myriads of holy angels to destroy sinful mankind. (Matt. 26:53) But, voluntarily, the Lord Jesus had laid aside these rights. Voluntarily, the Lord of glory had assumed our nature—yet without sin. Voluntarily, he had become weak in certain respects, as are we. Voluntarily, the Holy Son of God had submitted himself to his Father's wrath and anger, on our behalf. Voluntarily, the Lord Jesus had taken upon himself the insults of mankind, that he might redeem a people for himself by making atonement for their sins. (Phil. 2:6-8; Acts 15:14)

Thus, Christ did not please himself, but he gave himself up for us all, to honour and please his Father in heaven. The Lord of glory bore willingly the gross insults of sinful men and women. How much more, therefore, should we bear with the minor failings of our weaker brothers or sisters? (1 Pet. 2:23-24)

Thus, Paul says in verse 4:

### **Romans 15:4**

Here, Paul is referring to verse 9 of Psalm 69, which he had just quoted in the latter part of verse 3 above. This Scripture, and all other parts of God's Word, were written to provide instruction. They are as true and applicable to our lives today, as they were to the lives of those who first read or heard them thousands of years ago.

Through the Scriptures, God provides us with the determination to endure or to persevere in the faith. By these same Scriptures, the Lord gives us constant encouragement, leading us to unfailing and assured hope in him and in everything that he has promised.

Now, then, infers Paul, since God has given us these precious truths for our learning and instruction, let us heed them and be heartened by them. Let us remember the examples of all those faithful servants of God whose lives are recorded for us in the Scriptures. They suffered much. They endured much. But, they persevered in their faith considering not only themselves, but also their fellow believers. They honoured God. They interceded with God for their fellow believers, instead of disregarding their many weaknesses. They recognised that they themselves were possessed of many similar weaknesses.

In verses 5 and 6, Paul continues by saying:

### **Romans 15:5-6**

Paul is anxious to maintain a spirit of harmony and unity among the believers at Rome. He has no desire to hear of splits arising in the church over differences of opinion, especially, when these differences arise from disputes about non-essential matters or matters of individual private conscience. Thus, the apostle prays that the same God who provides us with endurance and encouragement will grant to these believers at Rome a spirit of unity. Only in this way, could peace and harmony prevail within the church.

Without peace and harmony, however, the church could not continue to grow in the things of God or to produce the fruit of a sanctified and holy life. But, where the fruit of the Spirit abounded, and love, peace, unity, and harmony prevailed, the whole church together would join in unified praise to God—to the glory of his great eternal name.

With this object in mind, therefore, Paul writes in verse 7:

### **Romans 15:7**

For our sins and failings, Christ had every reason to judge and condemn us. However, in his love and mercy, he accepted and forgave us. He is sinless and perfect. We, however, are very sinful and imperfect. How, then, can we judge a brother or sister over a matter of conscience? How, then, can we criticise or condemn them for their apparent spiritual weakness or immaturity? We cannot. Christ has accepted us with all our faults. We must accept others in spite of their faults. Thus, by maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we bring praise, honour, and glory to God: For he has accepted us and bound us together in the one body of Christ our Redeemer.

In verses 8 and 9a, Paul continues by citing the example of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

### **Romans 15:8-9a**

Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. (Rev. 17:14; 19:16; see also 1Tim. 6:15) He is the one through whom God created the entire universe, and by whose power and might



he now sustains it. (Col. 1:16-17) He is Lord of all; and all mankind will submit to his sovereign sway.

Yet, for the sake of sinners, Christ veiled his glory. He took upon himself the form of a man, and in that form, he humbled himself. He became a servant of others—for their sakes, and for that of the gospel. To this end, he—the Lord of glory—became a servant to the Jews. He did this to fulfil the covenant promise that God had made to Abraham and to the other patriarchs of the Jewish race: For, salvation derives from the promise that God gave to Abraham and to his descendants—the promise concerning the suffering Servant of the LORD. (John 4:22; Gen. 1:2-3; 17:1ff; Isaiah 53:1ff)

In the church at Rome, it may have been Jewish believers whom some Christians considered as being the weaker brothers or sisters in Christ. This was because of their scruples over such things as 'unclean' meats. Thus, Paul emphasised to the Gentile believers in the church that Christ lowered himself to serve the Jews for the sake of God's truth. And, by his service to the Jewish people and by his obedience to God, the gospel of eternal salvation was extended to Gentiles as well as Jews. Thus, Gentile and Jewish believers together have cause to praise and glorify the name of the Lord. So, in verse 9b, Paul says:

#### **Romans 15:9b**

{Cf. 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49}

Paul sees in this passage, written by David, the time when the Jewish believers would sing the praises of God in the midst of the Gentiles. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle interprets this to mean that—on the day of which David speaks—Jewish and Gentile believers would sing God's praises together. This interpretation is confirmed by the next quotation, which Paul cites from the book of Deuteronomy:

#### **Romans 15:10**

{Cf. Deut. 32:43}

Here, it is evident that Gentile and Jewish believers unite to praise the Lord.

In verse 11, Paul cites from Psalm 117 verse 1:

#### **Romans 15:11**

{Cf. Psalm 117:1}

Here again, the Scripture speaks of a time when the Gentiles will have cause to praise the mercy and grace of God in salvation, in common with their Jewish counterparts.

In verse 12, the apostle quotes a well-known passage from the prophet, Isaiah:

#### **Romans 15:12**

{Cf. Isaiah 11:10}

Here, Isaiah was prophesying of the coming Messiah, the root of Jesse, and the father of David. Christ is ruler over all nations, not over Israel alone. People from among all nations would yet hope in him; that is, they would experience hope of salvation and eternal life through faith in the Messianic Redeemer. Thus, both Jewish and Gentile believers together would praise the name of the Lord for his wondrous love, mercy, and grace. This is

God's plan for his church; and the redeemed and holy church of God must not become disunited or divided by petty disputes. (Eph. 2:14-18)

Paul concludes the first part of this section by writing in verse 13:

### **Romans 15:13**

Paul's prayer for the Roman believers is that God may fill their hearts and minds with the settled peace that leads to holy joy in the Lord.

When the joy of the Lord fills our hearts and his peace reigns supreme within our lives, we do not concern ourselves with minor issues or seek to find faults in the conduct or opinions of others. On the contrary, and out of our deep love for them in Christ Jesus, we gladly bear with their failings and weaknesses. Instead of harming them, we do all in our power to help and encourage them in their faith.

By thus honouring God, and trusting in him, we find that God's Holy Spirit fills our hearts and lives to an even greater degree. Consequently, our joy in the Lord reaches overflowing proportions. But, as this is spiritual joy overflows from our inner being, it cascades, as it were, over the lives of other believers. Our joy in the Lord refreshes their spirits and fills their hearts with love, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:18-19).

## **Paul's Ministry to God**

### **Romans 15:14-19**

In providing these instructions to the believers at Rome (many of whom he had never met personally), the apostle Paul does not want to give them the impression that he is lording it over their faith. He is the Lord's servant, and a servant of the gospel for the sake of the churches. (2 Cor. 1:24; cf. 1 Pet. 5:3)

Paul loves these believers dearly. He desires only to unite, strengthen, and encourage them in their faith. He is confident that they are already well instructed in the Word of God, and capable of imparting their knowledge of the things of God to others. Thus, to show the Roman believers that he is aware of their spiritual progress and maturity, he says to them in verse 14:

### **Romans 15:14**

Here, Paul reassures these Christians of his confidence in them as individual believers and in their ability to instruct each other.

To provide instruction in spiritual matters presupposes a sound working knowledge of spiritual principles and practices. Additionally, however, the word translated 'instruct' in the NIV is not the ordinary word meaning 'to teach'. Rather, it is a more intense word, meaning 'to teach thoroughly' or 'in depth'. It may also bear the meaning, 'to counsel', or 'to advise' (competently).

Thus, Paul believes that these Roman Christians are well able to resolve problems and difficulties that arise in their midst; including the present dispute concerning matters of conscience. However, the believers at Rome had to show a willingness to deal with such problems as they arose, without being prompted from someone outside their local church. Thus, in verses 15 and 16, Paul writes:

**Romans 15:15-16**

Paul had not established the church at Rome; and, indeed, for many years he had been labouring in other lands. However, God had appointed Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles, just as he had appointed Peter the apostle of the Jews. (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8-9)

Apparently, the Roman church consisted of both Jews and Gentiles; although, in the (then current) capital of the Roman Empire, it is probable that Gentile believers predominated. This may have been one of the reasons for the current dispute in the church. Perhaps, some of the Gentile believers resented having to yield to the scruples of the Jewish minority. Nevertheless, Paul feels it his duty to address this issue, since he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

Thus, the apostle concedes in verse 15 that he had written to the believers frankly or boldly. He also concedes, however, that he was writing to them only by way of reminder, since he assumed that they were already familiar with these points concerning matters of conscience; although, they had not been regarding them as God intended.

Paul then explains to the church at Rome that, by his grace, God had made him a minister or servant to the Gentiles. Part of his ministry included the duty of proclaiming the gospel of God among the Gentiles. Thus, by God's grace in salvation, many Gentiles turned to the Lord, being presented to him as an acceptable offering. Their hearts, minds and souls—their entire inner being—had been cleansed by the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was their one and only Great High Priest, and he ever lives to intercede with God on behalf of the saints. (Heb. 7:25-28)

With every other regenerated child of God, the Holy Spirit would continue to sanctify the hearts, minds, and souls of these believers at Rome every day of their lives. Paul, therefore, felt it his duty and responsibility before God, to guide, strengthen, and counsel the Gentiles whom God had committed to him.

Although he had never visited Rome, Paul was personally acquainted with several of the believers there, and with their families. Indeed, the apostle loved all the believers at Rome, and elsewhere, and he prayed for them constantly. His heart's desire was to unite them in their faith and in their love for God, for his Son, and for one another. Thus, in verses 15-19, Paul continues by saying:

**Romans 15:17-19**

Paul had already stated that God had privileged him greatly by appointing him as an apostle and minister to the Gentiles. However, the apostle desires to emphasise that—although God has honoured him greatly—he is nevertheless a servant of God, of Christ, and of the gospel. Paul does not glory in the honours that God has bestowed upon him, but in the fact that the Lord had chosen him, the worst of sinners, to minister the gospel to the Gentiles.

Thus, Paul places himself and his ministry in the shade as he turns his reader's attention to the one whom he serves, and who is working through him; namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. If Gentiles were turning to the Lord—as indeed they were—it was not because of Paul, but because of the Lord Jesus who was working through Paul.

Even the miracles that Paul performed in the midst of the people did not derive from the apostle himself. As a mere human being, the apostle possessed no inherent power to perform divine miracles. These divine signs and wonders were being performed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, once more, all praise, honour, and glory redounded to God the Father, to his Son, and to the Holy Spirit of God.

## **Paul Desires to Visit Rome**

### ***Romans 15:20-33***

Paul remained utterly faithful to his commission. He laboured long and hard among the Gentiles for his Lord and Master. He endured considerable affliction and persecution for the sake of Christ's name (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8-11). But, he continued in his ministry, carrying the gospel all the way round from Jerusalem to Illyricum. (Illyricum formed part of the region of Albania and the former Yugoslavia).

In verses 20 and 21, Paul continues:

### **Romans 15:20-21**

{Cf. Isaiah 52:15}

Paul's heart burned within him as he proclaimed the gospel of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ wherever that name had not been heard. He was a true pioneer missionary, absolutely faithful to Christ and to his cause. Yet, the apostle did not desire to enter any area that had been covered already by other servants of Christ. He believed that each man should assume responsibility for his own area, and not overlap unnecessarily with others.

This may explain why Paul had not visited Rome earlier. Others had established the church at Rome, and perhaps Paul had no wish to intrude on their ministry. Once that church had been established, and he himself could spare the time, he might make a visit to the capital of the Empire. Indeed, in verse 22, Paul hints at the reason for the delay in going to Rome:

### **Romans 15:22**

As long as Paul was actively engaged in his present ministry, he could not spare the time to cross the Adriatic and travel on to Rome. Additionally, as we have noted already, the apostle had no wish to work where others were already working. Thus, if and when he came to Rome—which he certainly desired to do—it would probably take the form of a passing courtesy visit for mutual fellowship and praise to God.

In verses 23 and 24, Paul expresses his strong desire to visit the believers at Rome:

### **Romans 15:23-24**

Now, at last, Paul had succeeded in making the gospel of Christ Jesus known in all the major cities where he had been labouring for many years. The work in these areas was by no means complete. Nevertheless, Paul had been instrumental in establishing many local churches throughout these areas. Perhaps the apostle was confident that these churches would continue the work that he had begun.

Now, Paul feels that it is time for him to move on. Much of Western Europe had not yet heard the gospel, and Paul is anxious to bring the message of eternal life to the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire, toward the west. This would take him as far as Spain.

Paul, therefore, reaffirms to the believers at Rome his deep desire to meet with them on his way to Spain. The apostle looked forward to their fellowship, but he also believed that they would be of great assistance to him as he journeyed onward to Spain. Firstly, however—and God willing—the apostle planned to spend some time among the believers at Rome, getting to know them and sharing fellowship with them.

Anxious as he undoubtedly was to begin his journey, however, Paul had one other matter to attend to first. Thus, in verses 25 and 26 the apostle writes:

**Romans 15:25-26**

Before Paul travels to Rome, he must journey up to Jerusalem. A number of believers in the church at Jerusalem were desperately poor, and in need of the necessities of life. Perhaps, some of the saints had lost their wealth or means of support during the persecution of the Christians in that area. Others, however, had always been poor or very poor. Perhaps more so than others, these distressed believers depended on the Lord to provide their everyday needs.

Many of the churches abroad—such as those in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia—had learned of the plight of the Jerusalem church. These provincial churches had resolved, by God's grace, to assist their brothers and sisters at Jerusalem. This may have resulted from Paul's previous communication with them, apprising them of the situation and requesting their support. Indeed, the apostle sent such letters to the churches of Galatia and Corinth. (1 Cor. 16:1-4) Now, Paul is about to carry the contribution from each of these churches to the believers at Jerusalem.

Paul acknowledges that these Gentile churches contributed willingly to the needs of the Jewish saints. Thus, in verse 27 he writes:

**Romans 15:27**

The churches of Macedonia and Achaia, both predominantly Gentile churches, gave willingly to help their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. However, Paul reminds them that—although they contributed willingly, and no doubt generously—the Gentiles nevertheless owed a great deal to the Jewish people. As to his true humanity, the Lord Jesus was Jewish. The first disciples were Jewish. And Paul himself was a Jewish Christian, a former Pharisee—the strictest sect among the Jews.

Principally, however, the blessings of salvation came to the Gentiles because the Jews, as a nation, rejected God's Son and God's salvation. In keeping with his Father's eternal plan for the world, the Lord Jesus commanded that the gospel be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth. Thus, since the Gentiles had received such immense spiritual blessings because of the Jews, the Gentiles owed it to the Jews to assist them in any way possible, including materially. (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Gal. 3:8)

Paul continues in verses 28 and 29 by saying:

**Romans 15:28,29**

In returning to Jerusalem, however, Paul is conscience that he is putting himself at some risk. Many of the Jewish religious authorities at Jerusalem still sought to destroy Paul because God had been using him powerfully to turn people to Christ; the very one whom the apostle had once persecuted (cf. Acts 23:12f; 25:3f). With this in mind, Paul writes in verses 30-33:

**Romans 15:30-33**

Realising the dangers inherent in returning to Judea, the apostle seeks the prayer support of the Christians at Rome. Paul has already endured much hardship and suffering for the sake of Christ's name, but he has no desire to evade what he considers to be his duty before God. Thus, he intends to go to Jerusalem, regardless of any personal danger. Never-

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theless, the apostle seeks the prayerful support of the Lord's people on his behalf. (See Acts 21:10-14)

Paul's chief concern is that he may be of some benefit to the believers at Jerusalem, both through the gift that he has brought from the Gentile churches and by his own personal ministry. Thereafter—if God permitted—Paul hopes to begin his journey to Rome. The apostle eagerly and joyfully anticipated meeting the saints at Rome. He believed that their fellowship with one another would be for their mutual edification, encouragement, and blessing.

Paul concludes chapter 15 of Romans by praying that the God of peace might be with, and ever remain with, the dear saints at Rome.

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## Romans Chapter 16

### Greetings to Believers at Rome

#### **Romans 16:1-16**

In chapter 16, Paul sends greetings to several individuals and families that were known to him. Although Paul had not yet visited Rome, he knew a number of believers from that church. Possibly, he had met them on their journeys between Rome and Jerusalem. The Roman military roads of the time were well constructed. Apparently, these roads were used extensively for travelling from the capital to the furthest reaches of the vast Roman Empire.

In verses 1 and 2, Paul begins by saying:

#### **Romans 16:1-2**

Pheobe served the Lord in the church at Cenchrea. Cenchrea was about seven miles from the city of Corinth, and acted as one of the main seaports for Corinth. Apparently, Phoebe had been of great help to many people, including Paul, and the apostle warmly commend her to the believers at Rome.

It is not stated expressly why Phoebe was making the journey from Cenchrea to Rome via Corinth. Perhaps, among other reasons, this lady would be carrying Paul's letter to the Roman church. Thus, Paul exhorts the church at Rome to receive her warmly, and to help for in any way possible.

In verses 3-4, Paul begins to address his contacts at Rome:

#### **Romans 16:3-4**

Paul had first met Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth. Aquila was a Jew, coming originally from Pontus in north-east Asia Minor (now northern Turkey). Later however, Aquila had moved to Rome, and had lived there until the emperor Claudius had issued an edict expelling all Jews from Rome. Aquila had then left Rome together with his wife Priscilla, and had settled temporarily at Corinth. It was there that Paul had met them. Since both Paul and Aquila were tentmakers, they had worked together for a while at this trade. (Acts 18: 1-4)

Subsequently, Aquila and Priscilla (or Prisca) had returned to Rome—presumably, after the death of the emperor Claudius. Thus, Paul extends his warmest greetings to this couple. The apostle commends this dear couple to the church for the great help they had provided him in times of danger, and also the Gentile churches. The New Testament does not record the details of Priscilla and Aquila's most valuable and—at times—hazardous ministry. However, it was apparently well known among the churches.

Even at the time that Paul wrote this letter, Priscilla and Aquila were continuing in their service to the Lord. Thus, in verse 5a, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 16:5a**

In addition to the times of worship and fellowship at the church at Rome, Priscilla and Aquila held meetings for believers in their own home. These meetings might be to study God's Word more fully and to grow in their faith and in the knowledge of the Word. It

might also be to help, encourage, and strengthen young converts to the faith by providing them with ongoing instruction between the regular church services. This, of course, was nothing new for Aquila and Priscilla. While living in Corinth, believers had met at their home in that city. (1 Cor. 16: 19)

In verse 5b, Paul writes:

### **Romans 16:5b**

In the King James Version, it says that Epenetus was the firstfruits of Achaia. This could only have been possible, however, if Epenetus had been a member of Stephanas' household, as Paul declares that Stephanas and his house were the firstfruits of Achaia. (1 Cor. 16: 15) Probably, however, it is better to understand Epenetus as being the firstfruits of (proconsular) Asia, as rendered by the NIV and other modern versions, and as contained in several of the oldest manuscripts.

In verse 6, Paul writes:

### **Romans 16:6**

Mary (or Miriam) cannot be positively identified. However, Paul knew how faithfully and diligently this woman had laboured for the Lord at Rome. The apostle sends to this dear saint his warmest greetings in the Lord.

In verse 7, Paul writes:

### **Romans 16:7**

If Junias is the correct translation of the Greek form, then the name would appear to be masculine. The full form of the masculine is 'Junianus'. The feminine form is 'Junia'.

Paul terms Andronicus and Junias as his relatives. He does not add the phrase, 'according to the flesh'. This omission has suggested to some interpreters that the apostle is using this term in a general sense to denote members of his race, rather than members of his family. However, despite objections to the contrary, there seems to be no legitimate reason for departing from the normal meaning of the Word. We know that Paul had relatives in Corinth. (Rom. 16:21) There is no reason why he might not also have had relatives in Rome, although perhaps belonging to a more remote branch of his family.

Both Andronicus and Junias had been in bonds, together with Paul, for the sake of the gospel. Since Paul had not yet visited Rome, this must have happened elsewhere; perhaps while Andronicus and Junias were visiting Jerusalem.

Paul also observes that these two believers—who came to a knowledge of the Saviour before Paul did—were outstanding among the apostles. This could be interpreted to mean that Andronicus and Junias were themselves apostles of outstanding merit. However, several objections may be raised against this view. Firstly, only the twelve apostles and Paul are specifically termed, *the* apostles. Secondly, since Andronicus and Junias became believers at an early period in the church's history, their appointment as apostles would have been noted in God's Word. Probably, in fact, Luke would have recorded it in the Acts of the Apostles. No such notification exists, however. Thirdly, had these two believers been apostles in the church at Rome, Paul would have included their names in his opening remarks of his letter to that church. He did not do so.

(Incidentally, Paul's omission of Peter's name from this letter would have amounted to a gross discourtesy if Peter had been in any way connected with the church at Rome. Clearly, therefore, Peter could not have been present (or even temporarily absent) or Paul

would have mentioned him. Thus, Peter could not have founded the church at Rome; especially since he was one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem at the time in question.)

However, to return to Andronicus and Junias, it is evident that they were not apostles—except perhaps in the more general sense that Paul's fellow labourers, Barnabas and others, are sometimes designated apostles. (Acts 14:14) Rather, among the apostles, Andronicus and Junias were esteemed very highly. This seems to be what Paul had in mind when he said, *they were outstanding among the apostles*.

In verse 8, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 16:8**

Nothing is known of this brother. However, Ampliatus was well known to Paul and dearly loved by him in the Lord. Thus, the apostle sends him his personal greetings.

In verse 9, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 16:9**

Again, we know nothing of a specific nature concerning either Urbanus or Stachys. However, it would appear that at some period in the past, Urbanus had laboured for the sake of the gospel, perhaps spending some time with Paul. Stachys, too, is apparently well known to Paul, and the apostle extends his warmest greetings to both these dear saints.

In verse 10, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 16:10**

Once more, Apelles is another unknown name. However, he receives Paul's highest commendation and praise when the apostle says of Apelles that he is tested and approved in Christ. Apparently, this man had proved faithful to Christ in the midst of severe affliction or persecution.

According to Lightfoot, Aristobulus may have been the grandson of Herod the Great. However, Aristobulus was a fairly common name, and Paul may be referring to some other individual. Since Aristobulus himself is not addressed, we must presume either that he had died before Paul wrote this letter, or that he himself was not a Christian. Whatever may be the case, Paul sends his warmest greetings to the household of Aristobulus.

In verse 11, the apostle writes:

#### **Romans 16:11**

Paul refers to Herodion as 'my relative'. The apostle could be using this term rather loosely to mean a person of his own race. However, it seems more natural to understand the phrase as meaning that Herodion was in some way related to Paul's family. We know from the Emperor Claudius' edict to expel all Jews from Rome that a large number of Jewish (and Christian) families had settled in or near the capital. Not all Roman emperors were adverse to the Jews. Some Jewish individuals were even admitted into the emperor's court, or into the families of the Roman legions. In addition, a number of Roman slaves or freedmen serving in the emperor's court had become Christians.

Paul then sends his greetings to the household of Narcissus who were in the Lord. Paul does not address Narcissus directly. This may imply—as with Aristobulus—that he had died or that he may not have been a believer. However, it is also possible that Paul in-

tended to comprehend both individuals under the general appellation of their respective 'households'.

Again, we cannot positively identify Narcissus. A man of this name was well known to the emperor Claudius. Apparently, this man influenced the emperor considerably. However, it is difficult to reconcile the behaviour of Claudius against the Jews and Christians with this view. This is particularly true in view of the fact that the Narcissus whom Claudius knew was alleged to have so much influence over the emperor. It would also be difficult to see how Narcissus' relationship with the emperor could remain tenable in view of the emperor's rage against Christians following the destructive fire of Rome. It may be better to assume, therefore, that the Narcissus whom Paul mentioned is a different individual, and one whose household Paul loves in the Lord.

In verse 12, Paul writes:

### **Romans 16:12**

Paul singles out for commendation these three women. These dear saints of God had laboured faithfully and with great diligence in the Lord's service, and Paul feels that their service should be recognised and praised. We do not know exactly what form of service occupied the hands or minds of these godly women. They may have served as deaconesses; they may have acted as helpers in the church, or they may have been involved in some background task. Many background tasks are vital to the welfare of the church, but they may be little noticed among most of the church members. Whatever may have been their tasks, these women were serving the Lord with all their heart.

In verse 13, Paul writes:

### **Romans 16:13**

Rufus is mentioned as being *chosen in the Lord*. This appellation, however, is true of every believer in Christ Jesus if the word 'chosen' is being used in its normal sense to mean 'elect'. It is therefore more probable that Paul is using the term to mean 'choice' or 'noble' in the Lord; i.e., a person of outstanding worth, merit, or character in the Lord.

Whether this Rufus is the same as the Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21 remains uncertain. If so, this Rufus would be one of Simon of Cyrene's two sons (the other being Alexander). Simon was the man compelled by the Romans to help carry the cross of Jesus.

Paul also extends his warmest greetings in the Lord to the mother of Rufus. Paul does not name this woman. However, the apostle considers her worthy of special mention partly because of the maternal and spiritual love she showed not only to her own son, but also to Paul himself. Paul, we must remember, tells us that he had suffered the loss of all things for the sake of Christ. (Phil. 3:8)

This does not mean, however, that the apostle no longer acknowledged or prayed for his own relatives. This very passage finds Paul mentioning some of his relatives and greeting them. However, these would probably be relatives that were more distant, rather than his immediate family. It was to help fill the gap with his immediate family that Rufus' mother acted as a spiritual mother to Paul. Clearly, the apostle deeply appreciated this ministry on the part of Rufus' mother.

In verse 14, the apostle writes:

**Romans 16:14**

Nothing specific is known about these believers. Their names may indicate that they were either slaves or freedmen. In Greek mythology, Hermes—of which Hermas is a variant—was a messenger of the gods. At least some of the names listed here would appear to be of Greek rather than Latin extraction.

In verse 15, Paul writes:

**Romans 16:15**

Again these individuals cannot be identified, but clearly, Paul knew them.

When Paul sent his greetings to the individual mentioned in verses 14 and 15, he adds the phrase, *and the brothers with them* (v.14), and, *and all the saints with them* (v.15). This may imply that these groups did not always meet at Rome's principal church, but in smaller churches or possibly house-churches. If, in the early days of the church, only one major church existed in the sprawling city of Rome, then it is quite possible that subordinate or satellite churches would spring up in other parts of this vast metropolis. These satellite churches would still recognise the main church at Rome as their mother church. This would be very similar to the situation at Jerusalem where the Jerusalem church acted as a mother church to many outlying or provincial churches.

In verse 16, the apostle writes:

**Romans 16:16**

Paul exhorts the believers at Rome to reaffirm their love for one another in Christ Jesus with a holy kiss. This was a common sign of greeting in the East. However, Paul reminds the Roman Christians that—for the believer—this expression of mutual love is sanctified as holy to the Lord. It is, in fact, an expression of the purest brotherly and sisterly affection among the redeemed and holy children of God.

Paul ends this section by sending greetings from all the churches in the areas where he had been labouring for Christ. Although separated by many miles, the believers are one in spirit and one in Christ with their brothers and sisters at Rome.

**Beware of Divisive People****Romans 16:17-20**

Some commentators have questioned why Paul has inserted the next few verses, warning against divisive people, between the verses containing greetings. Perhaps we should note, however, that—apart from the remarks concerning Phoebe—all the verses containing greetings up to and including verse 16, are addressed *to individuals and groups at Rome*; as also is the following passage concerning those who cause divisions. However, when Paul resumes his greetings in verse 21, these greetings are being sent *from Paul's associates to Rome*. Thus, the present construction of this chapter seems—at least, to this writer—to be perfectly orderly and natural.

Let us, however, examine the next few verses concerning false teaching. In verse 17, Paul says to be believers at Rome:

### Romans 16:17

The apostle considers this matter to be of the greatest importance. He is deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of the church. Thus, Paul admonishes and exhorts the brothers at Rome to be on their guard. They are to be constantly vigilant for those whose teaching or example causes strife, disunity, and division. They are to watch out for anyone who would attempt to place obstacles in the way of the believers' simple faith in Christ. For, by so doing, they may cause that believer to stumble, or to doubt some aspect of his or her faith.

Anything that was contrary to the teachings of the Lord Jesus and his apostles was to be rejected out of hand. No allowance was to be made for divisive people or for false teachers, nor was the church to share fellowship with them. Indeed the apostle expressly states that the believers were to keep away from such. If such individuals or groups arose from within the fellowship, and would not acknowledge their sin or repent of the pernicious error, the church was to remove them from its communion.

In writing this section, the apostle Paul may have been thinking about those who disputed over matters of food and drink, and whom he had spoken about earlier in this letter. However, although such disagreements did nothing to benefit the church, they were not doctrinal issues in the sense that acceptance of one particular point of view or another was an essential element of salvation. Furthermore, these differences of opinion in non-essential matters arose among genuine Christians. However, the disputes to which Paul is referring did not originate with genuinely committed Christians but with false teachers, or at least with carnal Christians. Those who promote false doctrine or who seek to divide the church are not the servants of God but of the evil one. At the very least, these individuals had been taken captive by Satan to do his will.

It is much more likely, therefore, that the apostle had in mind something akin to the false teaching and divisiveness among God's people caused by the Judaizers. We must remember that these false teachers were disturbing the faith of the church by insisting on the supposed necessity of circumcision, and by demanding that the believers observe the ceremonial laws of Moses.

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul censures and condemns such teaching uncompromisingly. Since this heresy had become widespread, it is probable that it would have reached the church at Rome. The apostle however, does not mention this particular heresy by name, nor does he refer to it by nature. By doing this, Paul is allowing the believers the freedom to apply the general principles of his warning remarks to any form of false teaching that they might encounter; then, or in the future. Other forms of false teaching that were current at that time (or that soon would become current) included the Colossian heresy—i.e., the worship of angels—and a denial of Christ's true humanity.

With the rise, in later generations, of the Arian and other destructive heresies, this would include the denial of Christ's deity. Such false teaching would also include the denial of the Lord Jesus' essential and eternal union with the Father. Again, it would include a denial of the eternity and triune nature of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God blessed forever. Amen.

In verse 18, Paul exposes the true motive of these false teachers:

### Romans 16:18

These individuals are not the servants of the Lord Jesus; and, if not the servants of Christ, then they can only be the servants of the evil one. Their motives are not to glorify God, and minister to his church by feeding it on the sacred and imperishable Word of God. Rather, they are self-centred in their motives and consumed only by the desires of their

own carnal appetites. Granted, many of these individuals may be fluent in speech and convincing in their arguments. Hence, by their flattering speech they deceive the unwary, and by their powerful arguments they lead astray the naive or innocent believer.

Then and now, these men are enemies of the cross and of Christ. They are servants of Satan arrayed as angels of light. (2 Cor. 11:13-15) Do not let them deceive you, asserts Paul. In fact, have nothing to do with them, because they do not belong to the church, nor are they the children of God. Expel them from your midst!

Paul now turns his attention to the believers in the church at Rome. In verse 19, the apostle writes:

**Romans 16:19**

The Roman believers' reputation for obedience to God and to the faith was celebrated among the churches. Thus, Paul rejoiced in their willingness to submit to the Word and will of God, and to honour and glorify God by applying his Word to their lives.

Paul realises, however, that a certain amount of sanctified wisdom and understanding was vital in order to be aware of certain potential dangers. Thus, the apostle exhorts them to seek from God the wisdom that comes from the Father above. This wisdom alone will help them to discern truth from error. (James 1:5,17; 3:17)

Such wisdom, of course, is governed by the Holy Spirit. By taking the truths of God's Word, and by applying the wisdom that comes from God, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to recognise that which is good and true and he exposes that which is false and evil. Paul does not want these dear saints to become involved in any form of evil. (1 Thess. 5:22) Rather, as far as it is possible, the apostle earnestly desires that they remain completely innocent and untainted by evil. Therefore, he counsels them to be filled with wisdom. Paul knows that the wisdom that God imparts to the believer will guard their souls and will alert their minds to the approaches of the evil one or his evil messengers.

Continuing this theme in verse 20, the apostle writes:

**Romans 16:20**

Those who cause division in the church by teaching false doctrines destroy the peace and harmony that ought to prevail among God's children. Such, of course, is Satan's intention for the church. However, God will not permit his church to be harmed by Satan or by his evil representatives. Ultimately, the Lord will intervene. However, it is the responsibility of the church leaders in the first instance to recognise division, error or false teaching and to deal with it according to the instructions of God's holy Word. Then, God will restore peace to his church and to his people. Then—through the actions of the church leadership in expelling false teachers—God will crush Satan under the feet of his people.

Ultimately, of course, a day will come when the Lord will finally banish Satan to his appointed place. Then, or in the fullest sense possible, God will crush Satan under the feet of his saints. (Gen. 3:15; Luke 10:18; Rev. 20:1-10)

The apostle Paul concludes this paragraph by praying that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will be bestowed upon the church and the individual believers at Rome.

## Greetings from Paul's Associates

### **Romans 16:21-23**

We come now to the concluding section of this letter and to some final greetings from Paul and from his associates. In verse 21, Paul writes:

#### **Romans 16:21**

Timothy, of course, was Paul's faithful co-worker and the recipient of two of Paul's epistles. This man too joins in sending his greetings to the Roman believers.

Paul refers to Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater as his 'relatives'. Again, these may be more distant relatives of the apostle. It does not seem probable that the apostle would use this term if he did not intend it to be understood literally of members of his family.

Lucius is an alternative form of Luke, as is Lucas. However, whether this is the same person as Luke, the physician and writer of the Gospel, is uncertain. A person by the name of Lucius of Cyrene is mentioned in Acts 13:1.

A man by the name of Jason is mentioned in Acts 17:6-9. Sosipater may be the same as Sopater, mentioned in Acts 20:4.

Whoever these men were, they were of great assistance to the apostle Paul, and they join with him in sending their heartfelt greetings to the believers in that great city.

In verse 22, Paul's amanuensis writes:

#### **Romans 16:22**

In common with most of his other letters, the letter to the church at Rome was written at Paul's dictation by a scribe or amanuensis. On this occasion, the scribe was Tertius. We know nothing further about this man. His name is of Latin extraction, meaning 'third'—but why he was so called, we do not know. Tertius, however, is anxious to express his warmest greetings to the believers at Rome.

In verse 23, Tertius records:

#### **Romans 16:23**

Gaius was one of the very few people whom Paul baptised personally (1 Cor. 1: 14). Nothing definite is known about Gaius. However, Paul mentions that he baptised both Crispus and Gaius. Crispus was a synagogue ruler, and he is associated with Titius Justus in Acts 18: 7-8.

For this reason, some commentators have supposed that Titius Justus, and Gaius, is the same person. His full Roman name would then be Gaius Titius Justus. This assumes that Paul is following his usual practise of addressing this person by his first name; i.e., Gaius.

This, however, must remain purely speculative, as there is no definite link between these two names, apart from the fact that a person called Crispus is associated with both, and that both provided hospitality to the saints. In Acts 18:1-3, Luke tells us that when Paul came to Corinth he stayed and worked with Priscilla and Aquila, rather than with Titius (or Titus) Justus whom Luke mentions in Acts 18:7, together with Crispus and his house.

(Three other people named *Gaius* are addressed in the NT. These are, Gaius 'the beloved' (3 John 1:1, 2, 5, 11), Gaius from Macedonia (Acts 19:29), and Gaius from Derbe (Acts 20:4).)



Whoever the present Gaius was, he was kind and generous enough to extend hospitality not only to the apostle Paul, but also to the whole church in that area. This implies that Gaius was a man of substantial means, and that he owned a sizeable property—both of which assets he placed willingly at the Lord's disposal. Now, this dear brother wishes to be remembered to the saints at Rome; and, to them, Gaius sends his warmest greetings.

In verse 23, Paul also mentions Erastus, the city of Corinth's director of public works. Whether this Erastus is the same as Paul's co-worker of that name, mentioned in Acts 19:22, and 2 Timothy 4:20, remains uncertain. Admittedly, both men (if indeed they were distinct individuals) were associated with Corinth, from where Paul wrote this letter.

Archaeologists have discovered a rectangular stone block inscribed with the phrase (in Latin):

*Erastus in return for his aedileship [i.e., Commissioner of Public Works] laid  
(the pavement) at his own expense.*

Again, we cannot prove conclusively that this was a man mentioned by Paul. Erastus was a common name, and it is possible that another man of the same name also held the office of Director (or Commissioner) of Public Works. At any rate, Erastus wishes to send his warmest greetings to the Christians and Rome.

Another brother mentioned in verse 23 is Quartus. However, nothing is known of this man. Clearly, however, these were close associate of Paul; at least, while he remained at Corinth. Quartus, therefore, extends his greetings in Christ Jesus to all the believers at Rome.

## Doxology

### **Romans 16:25-27**

We now come to Paul's magnificent doxology to this letter. Thus, in verses 25-27, the apostle closes with this matchless expression of praise and adoration to God:

### **Romans 16:25-27**

Paul glorifies God in this magnificent expression of praise. The apostle praises God that it is by his omnipotent strength or power that the children of God are established and strengthened in their faith. This takes place through the power of the everlasting gospel. But what essentially is the gospel? It is the proclamation or preaching to the entire world that Christ died and rose again to justify the repentant and believing sinner. For this too, Paul gives praise and thanks to God.

Paul declares that this gospel was revealed according to God's eternal plan and purposes for fallen and sinful mankind. From eternity, God planned the way of salvation through the suffering, dying, risen, and glorified Redeemer. However, throughout the period of the OT dispensation, this marvellous plan of salvation by grace through faith remained hidden to mankind.

Even although holy angels and prophets enquired diligently into the meaning of the OT Scriptures concerning Christ, its full meaning and significance remained hidden from them. (1 Pet. 1:11-12) Only with the coming of Christ and the preaching of the gospel did the Holy Spirit remove the veil. Then, the Spirit of God enabled men and women to understand the gospel, to believe the message, and so be saved. Thus, for his abundant and eternal salvation, and for the one who made this salvation possible by dying instead of sinners, Paul expresses heartfelt praise, adoration, and worship to God.

Yet, this message of eternal salvation is not confined any longer to the Jewish people. Now, God has commanded, and God's Son has commissioned, his disciples to proclaim

## **Expository Notes**

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the gospel to the entire world. Thus, men and women, boys and girls, from every nation on earth can respond to the call of the gospel. The Holy Spirit enables them to see and understand the truth. All those—without exception—whom the Father teaches and draws through the Holy Spirit will come to Christ. And whoever comes to Christ, he will never turn away. Thus, Paul glorifies God and Jesus Christ his Son. (John 6:37,44-45)

Paul finishes this glorious doxology with a resounding 'Amen!' We too might add our Amen for all the wonders of God's love, and for all that he has accomplished for sinful men and women through Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, draw near to God. Let us praise him from whom all blessings flow—for great is his name, and greatly to be praised! Amen.

*END*