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# The Book of Romans

A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



The apostle Paul, who described himself as a “bond-slave of Jesus Christ,” and “set aside for the gospel of God” started out as a villainous murderer of Christians and ended up as arguably the greatest missionary who ever lived. His letter to the Christians in Rome, written from Corinth, has been called, “the most profound work in existence.”

And yet, this historian and theologian, this apostle with the most impressive credentials of all the apostles, struggled with being a “wretched man” who continued to do what he did not want to do. In the midst of that internal conflict, he never deviated from his life's work of bringing the gospel to the world. He presents a compelling view of history from the perspective of God's plan for lost humanity starting with God's revelation of Himself in creation and how mankind turned from God, then turns to an explanation of how God used the children of Israel to birth the Messiah. He masterfully shows that all men –both Jews and Gentiles– are lost because of sin and in need of the Savior. He explains God's plan in giving the Law and how we have all fallen short, then unfolds God's glorious plan of salvation free of all condemnation through saving. faith in Jesus Christ.

But he doesn't stop there!

Paul's exposition on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work within every believer is a description of the joyous, fulfilling, amazing life Jesus made possible for all who believe in Him as Savior and LORD!

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## Introduction

"Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God., Romans 1:1

As he begins writing the book of Romans, Paul identifies himself as a "bond-servant of Jesus Christ.. This was a common metaphor for Paul. (See Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:1) He viewed Himself in the most literal terms as a purchased slave of Christ with no will of his own. Jesus was his Master.

He then states that he was called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of Christ. The word "apostle" here means a "sent-out one". He spent his life going far and wide for His Master. The word "apostle" when used as a gift of the Holy Spirit indicates a missionary calling. (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31)

The last phrase in this verse defines Paul's life-calling. He was "set aside for the gospel of God.. The mandate fell on him to both define and defend the gospel. He did this in nearly every book he wrote including the book of Romans. Philippians Chapter One may explain this calling best as he uses the word "gospel" six times in that chapter alone to explain his calling.

Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Rome from the city of Corinth. This letter has been called "the most profound work in existence.. In this book he was both an historian and a theologian. He presents a view of history from the perspective of God's plan for lost humanity. He starts with God's revelation of Himself in creation and how mankind turned from God. He then turns to an explanation of the Jewish people and how God used them to birth the Messiah. Following that, he masterfully shows that all men –both Jews and Gentiles, are lost because of sin and in need of the Savior. He explains God's original plan in giving the Law and how everyone has fallen short. As the book of Romans unfolds, Paul explains God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

But he doesn't stop there. He then moves into an in-depth exposition of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work within every believer. The book of Romans and the book of Galatians have a unique affinity.

Get ready for an amazing adventure as we walk verse by verse through the book of Romans. As always, my goal is to draw practical applications from every text for daily living. The Word of God is alive and relevant for today.

### **The Gospel in the Old Testament: Romans 1:1-2**

"1) Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2) which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,"

The Apostle Paul now makes a profound statement: The gospel of God can be found in the Old Testament. Indeed, he himself had only the Old Testament Scriptures to study and preach from, for the New Testament was not yet given.

The gospel can be preached from the story of Abraham offering his son Issac on the altar as found in Genesis 22. At the last moment God interviewed and provided that ram as the substitute payment for Isaac.

The gospel can be preached from the Passover Meal in Exodus 12 and the blood of the lamb on the doorway of the house of every family that believed in God's provision. The destroying angel passed over those homes, because a lamb had already died in place of the oldest son.

The gospel can be preached from Psalm 22 where nearly every word of Jesus was prophesied which He spoke from the cross. Indeed, the psalmist was so specific he even mentioned them casting lots for his garments.

The gospel can be preached from Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6-7. From these verses we can conclude that a virgin was going to be with child and His identity was going to be Mighty God. It is a prophecy of the incarnation.

The gospel can be preached from Isaiah 53 and the suffering servant. This text is a picture of Jesus dying for the sins of humanity. It is so specific that little is left to human imagination.

This is merely scratching the surface of the many Old Testament references that point to the Messiah. Altogether there were over 300 Old Testament Prophecies about the Messiah. Paul was right, everything about the gospel was promised beforehand in the holy Scriptures.

### **A Descendant of David: Romans 1:3**

"3) concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,.

One of the points Paul points out about Jesus, is that He was a direct descendant of King David. Both lineages in Matthew 1:1-6 and Luke 3:23-38 make this clear.

Why is this important. This qualifies Jesus to be the Messiah and the fulfillment of all of the promises to David that one of His descendants would rule on his throne forever. (See Psalms 132:10-11)

It might be more accurate to say that David was in the line of the Messiah rather than Jesus being in the line of David. (See Hebrews 1:8) There are literally hundreds of Old Testament references to this promise of the Messiah coming through David and eventually taking his throne. It is the subject of a lengthy personal study should you decide to tackle it at some point.

### **The Impact of the Resurrection. Romans 1:4**

"who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,"

Paul now hits the nail on the head. There is one thing that separates Jesus Christ from every other religious leader and human being that has ever lived on earth. It comes down to the resurrection. He is alive. He conquered death. The resurrection proved his claim of being God. This may sound like a trivial point until you ponder its significance.

One evening during my Bible college days, we were conducting an "Open Air Campaigners Meeting" on the streets of Chicago. After the meeting concluded, I turned to engage the man next to me in conversation. I asked him what he thought of the message.

He laughed and said, "You Christians are all alike. You are fools. You have nothing to base your religion on. I am on my way to Mecca to see the body of Muhammad. It is right there on display. We have something solid upon which to build our faith of Islam..

He then chuckled and said, "But when you Christians go to Jerusalem and look at the tomb of Jesus, it is empty. You have nothing to build your faith on.. I looked at him as if in wonderment and said, "What did you say?. He then repeated over and over again, "It is empty!. "It's empty!. "It's empty!. "There is nothing there... the body of Jesus is gone!. Just to make sure he was hearing himself, I asked one more time; "What did you say?.

He repeated emphatically twice more, "It's empty!. "Didn't anyone ever tell you it's empty!. Suddenly it hit him. His eyes were opened. He repeated again very slowly and this time to himself; "It's empty!. "It's empty because Jesus Christ is alive. He rose from the dead.

Muhammad is still in the grave because he was just a man..

The Holy Spirit was driving the Gospel into His heart and mind. He suddenly understood what Paul was saying in Romans 1:4, "who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!. That night he trusted in Jesus Christ as his Savior and changed his travel plans from Mecca to Jerusalem. He also changed his eternal destiny from hell to heaven.

Easter is much more than a fun holiday. It is a time the world stops to acknowledge the biblical message of the Resurrection. For those whose eyes are opened, it is the heart of the Gospel and hope of a new life, because Jesus Christ has conquered death. He is **alive**.

(If you ever get to Jerusalem, there is a place called "The Garden Tomb" that is worth a visit. It is almost certainly not the tomb of Jesus, but we do know it is of His era and would have been very, very similar to His tomb. Golgotha is easily seen from there and still looks unmistakably like "the place of the skull.") -dj

### **The Missionary Call: Romans 1:5-6**

"5) through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, 6) among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;"

In these verses, Paul talks about the grace and apostleship that was given to him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul had a unique calling. Just as Peter was called as the apostle to the Jewish people, God gave Paul a special grace and calling to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. (See Galatians 1:7-10)

In verse six, Paul made it clear that this included the Romans. The Great Commission to the church is to reach every nation with the gospel. (See Matthew 28:18-20) That task is still our calling today. On the cross Jesus made a way for all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

This is one of those areas where God's sovereignty and human responsibility dance together. Jesus paid it all, but He sends His followers to proclaim it everywhere. Romans 10:12-15 presents both the universal scope of the gospel and the need for God's people to carry the gospel message throughout the world.

The bottom line is that God has entrusted the mission of spreading the gospel around the world to the church. We must never lose sight of this mandate. God calls and equips His followers with a missionary call.

### **Beloved by God: Romans 1:7**

"7) to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul was a servant to believers everywhere, including those who were beloved by God in Rome. The word "beloved" means "those loved with Agape love." Paul had this kind of love for believers everywhere. He then pronounced his usual blessing of grace and peace upon them.

I look at grace in the context of daily Christian living as "God's Divine enablement made available to help me do what in and of myself I would not and could not do." It is strength for living a victorious life. We are not abandoned to live in our own strength or resources.

Peace is "the inner calmness of heart and soul no matter what our external circumstances might be, knowing that God is in control.. We do not need to be controlled or driven by anxiety and fear. Philippians 4:4-7 is the best explanation of this principle.

### **Becoming a 1:8 Christian: Romans 1:8**

"8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world..

Paul makes mention that the Christians in Rome were very zealous to share their faith. They were a mission-minded church. They began to emulate the dynamics of those who brought the gospel to them.

I personally believe they may have been evangelized by Christians from the church in Thessalonica. Paul hints of this in 1 Thessalonians 1:8; "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

This mission mindset may have had roots in Acts 1:8. It was there just before His ascension that Jesus said to His disciples; "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Jesus wanted every Christian to be a personal evangelist. In fact, it would not be stretching the teaching of Jesus to conclude that one sign of being Spirit-filled is a zeal and fruitfulness in sharing the gospel.

When taken together, these three verses paint the heart of the early church. Every Christian was active and not passive in sharing their faith. Jesus gave birth to a World Changing Movement.

Are these three 1:8 references coincidental? I sincerely doubt it. I believe they are providential. Ask God to transform you into 1:8 fruitfulness. Join the ranks of being a 1:8 World Changer!

### **Glimpse into a World Changer: Romans 1:9-10**

“9) For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10) always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.”

Paul loved preaching the gospel, ministering to people, and being on the front lines of where God was working. He was committed to building new believers and watching them grow into mature and fruitful followers of Christ.

God literally used Him to raise up the first and second wave of gospel workers who carried the Christian faith across Asia Minor, Macedonia, and into Rome itself. This guy was a living, breathing, walking, and talking catalyst for Jesus Christ.

These two verses illustrate that point. They give us a glimpse into Paul's prayer life and his life ambitions. He literally ate, drank, and breathed missions. In Philippians 1:21 he said; “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.. That was indeed the mantra of Paul's life.

Not everyone can have the focus and intensity of Paul for missions, but certainly God wants His people to move in that direction. Jesus made it clear in John 15:8 that God wants every believer to be fruitful for His glory.

The modern church is like a service station to patch people up so they can go their merry way through life with as few bumps, bruises, and hurts as possible. The early church was a radical transformation center that changed people from the bottom up and gave them a new focus, purpose, and calling in life. The modern church turns out people with a religious bent. The early church turned out World-Changers.

Paul didn't care how he got to Rome, he just wanted a slice of the action for the glory of God. When he finally arrived, he didn't get there sailing business class. He arrived in chains as a prisoner of Rome. But he became a spark that changed the course of human history.

These two verses give us a glimpse into the heart of the Apostle Paul. His passion, love for Jesus, and fire for the gospel were contagious. Ask God to infect you with this same passion for missions. Step into the sandals of Paul for just a few weeks. Sign up for a short term missions trip with GoServ Global or your church. Make this your transition year into becoming a World-Changer for the glory of God!

### **Keeping the Old Sword Sharp: Romans 1:11-12**

“11) For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12) that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.”

In these two verses Paul reveals his heart toward others. He longed for the believers who lived in Rome. He wanted to meet them and build them up. The idea of “imparting some spiritual gift to them” had in it the root idea of “enhancing their grace-walk with Jesus.” He wanted to impart value to their spiritual lives and service.

I do not believe the Roman believers were deficient in any of the manifestations of the Spirit spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Rather, I believe Paul was talking about mentoring them in daily Christian living, fruitful ministry, and godly wisdom.

Let's face it, the Christian life is very opposite of secular values. In fact, it is a radical culture shock for a worldly non-Christian to enter into the “ways of God” that accompanies salvation. When someone is born-again, a change takes place on the inside that is hard to comprehend or understand. Inner values begin to change. Paul longed to be present and guide the new Roman believers through this transformation process.

Verse 12 reveals the underlying mystery of true ministry. You cannot pour into others without being blessed yourself. When you encourage others, they encourage you. This is part of the bond of genuine Agape love.

This mystery has shaped my view of discipleship. It is never a one-way street. Paul understood that even the newest believer could speak into his life as well. When you pour into others it becomes reciprocal. Iron sharpens iron. You stay sharp by helping others become sharp. Paul knew he could learn from the Romans as well. He was forever a student. He longed to keep his old sword sharp.

### **Very Different People But The Same Message: Romans 1:13-15**

“(13) And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14) I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15) Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

In these three verses, Paul is acknowledging the radical difference between people and cultures, but that the gospel is the same for all people. We can adjust our methods, but the message remains the same.

Keep in mind, he was writing from Corinth which was part of the Greek empire. It was very intellectual, educated, sophisticated, and refined. It featured the fine arts and philosophical debate. It could be defined as “high culture.”

By contrast, the Romans were forceful, fierce, and demanding –and they were proud of it. They were by no means as educated as their Greek counterparts. Paul described them as “barbarian”, and so they were compared to the Greeks. Rome could be defined as “low culture.. The contrast between the two was very drastic. The Greeks featured the original Olympic Games, whereas the Romans built the Colosseums which featured the gladiators with blood and violence for sport. Everything about Greek and Roman culture was different right down to food and entertainment choices.

That’s what makes these three verses so profound. Paul acknowledged that he was equipped by the Holy Spirit to reach both groups and that the message was the same. The Gospel is as much needed by the rich and famous as it is by the common and ordinary.

Did you get that? The message does not change. Why? Because Paul later argues that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Everyone is sinful, lost, and separated from God and in need of the good news of the Gospel. He concludes that people can be smart and lost or foolish and lost.

There are all kinds of sinners. Some may be educated and sophisticated and know the finer arguments of philosophy and psychology, but like the Greeks, they are still sinful and lost. Others may be forceful and brutish and driven by all kinds of base passions, but like the Romans, they are still sinful and lost.

The profound take-away from these verses is that the Gospel message is the same for all people and needed by all people. Because of that, Paul recognized that he was qualified and equipped to reach all people. His message of Jesus Christ was the same for Jews, Greeks, and Romans. He was confident in sharing the gospel equally with everyone.

The same is true today. Modern people are as sinful and lost as ancient people were. The Holy Spirit still uses the same simple gospel message to reach and transform people today. It is the same message for all people, in all places, and at all times.

If you are a child of God, the Holy Spirit wants to use you to point others to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. We as Christians are merely the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who does the work of drawing and saving people. We merely love people and share the story.

**Not Ashamed: Romans 1:16-17**

“16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.””

Paul was belittled, mocked, and even persecuted for his message that Jesus was the Messiah. He spent his life sharing the story of how a humble Jewish carpenter’s son spent three years healing the sick, performing signs and wonders, and preaching a simple message of repentance and faith in God. His story included how the Jewish people rejected Him and the Romans crucified Him.

But that was not the end of his story. Paul also told of the resurrection and how Jesus was the atonement for the sins of humanity. By placing simple faith in Jesus, a person could be born-again and become a child of God. He concluded God’s only plan for human salvation was this message about Jesus Christ.

Now, let’s focus on the text before us. Paul was not ashamed of this message. He gave his life to defend and confirm this Gospel message. He saw it as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” It was here in this message that the righteousness of God was satisfied. On the cross, human sin was judged and love was extended to all people.

Paul was not religious. In fact, he was saved from a life of religion. He was preaching a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He finally found what he always longed and searched after.

This simple gospel message is God’s plan to save all people. That includes you and me. Do not shun or despise this message. Your eternal future depends on how you respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**God Has A Trigger Point: Romans 1:18-19**

“18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Since the time of the fall of Adam and Eve, a battle has been raging throughout human history. Satan as the master of deception has been trying to suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. And no wonder, for John 8:44 exposes him as a liar and the father of lies. By contrast, in John 14:4 Jesus calls himself the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the only way to the Father.

Paul exposes this battle in Romans 1:18. He then makes the observation that God always shows up with His wrath to stop Satan and his evil schemes. There is a very real sense in which God’s wrath is Divine intervention. *God always steps in before total evil can reign.*



God intervened in the ancient world through Noah and the flood. He stopped the reign of evil. God intervened in Sodom and Gomorrah. He stopped the reign of evil. Throughout human history God has intervened time and again to stop the reign of evil in the world.

Here is the key, *“unrighteousness always works to suppress the truth!”*. Never forget this principle. It happens in nations and it happens to individuals. Satan wants to blind minds, obscure truth, and lead people into captivity.

But the good news is that God always intervenes. He has a trigger point where He will let evil go no further. The goodness of God always steps in to prevent the ultimate reign of evil. Let me illustrate this concept with a very fresh personal illumination.

I have a digital alarm clock next to my bed. I often wake up in the night and look over to see the time. This morning I woke up and looked over to see 3:33 on my alarm clock. I thought to myself, “Wow, that’s really interesting.. Then I started thinking through the possible scenarios. I could see 1:11, 2:22, 3:33, 4:44, 5:55 ... but then I stopped with an astounding realization ... I will never see 6:66 on my alarm clock. Why? Because right after 6:59, the big 7:00 suddenly shines across the screen.

This morning, I realized that God has left a witness of Himself in time itself. According to Revelation 13:18, the number 666 is the number of the beast. His goal is to rule and reign. He will push his evil and deception again in the end times, but his plans will be interrupted by the return of the perfect One. The number “7” in the Bible is the number of completion and perfection. Just like on my digital alarm clock, right at after 6:59, Jesus is going to return and prevent the reign of evil. Throughout human history, God has never allowed 666 to fully be achieved.

This small illumination about the nature of time itself was a major blessing to me this morning. I don’t know what time it is right now in the world. Many believe the end is very close. It might be 6:55, but I am not going to be overcome by a frenzy of fear, because I understand with great certainty that 666 will never be realized because 7:00 is about to step in and intervene.

God’s Word is always exact. Did you notice what Paul said in Romans 1:18. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” If you want to take this to the next level, read Revelation 19:11-16 and see the description of how the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is going to be revealed from heaven. He is coming with wrath against the evil one and all unrighteousness. He will stop Satan’s goal to rule and reign on earth with his full scheme of evil.

### **The Battle for Truth: Romans 1:18-19**

“18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”

From the time the serpent stepped into the Garden of Eden, truth has been under attack.

Throughout all of human history, truth has been under attack. Paul makes it clear in Romans 1:18-32 that civilizations have come and gone because truth is under attack. Make no mistake in your thinking, the battles of the modern era are rooted in this same war against truth.

As we dig deep and analyze the first few chapters of the book of Romans, Paul identifies seven frontal battles in this age-old war against truth. These battles are being fought on seven primary fronts. They are:

1. The battle for truth about the existence of God.
2. The battle for truth about Creation and the origin of all things.
3. The battle for truth about human origin, purpose, and dignity.
4. The battle for truth in the area of human religion, philosophy, and ethics.
5. The battle for truth about human sexuality, morality, decency, and basic right and wrong.
6. The battle for truth about persona. responsibility, accountability, and judgment.
7. The battle for truth about the gospel and eternity.

I encourage you to read this list over and over again until the lights turn on in your thinking. Read it with your Bible open to the first three chapters of the book of Romans. Read with a highlighter in hand and take notes in your Bible as the Spirit of God illuminates you with insights about this battle.

Whether you care to accept it or not, you are caught in this same battle. The enemy of the human soul seeks to blind, confuse, and enslave everyone, including you and me. His goal is to “suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness.”

Jesus made it clear in John 8:31-32, that victory comes to those who abide in God’s Word and discover the truth. In fact, He promised, “... you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring a daily truth encounter into your life. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth. (See John 16:13)

Let me personalize this text. The Christian life is an ongoing journey of discovering truth and coming to freedom in each and every area of life. Welcome this journey. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring freedom and healing into your life. God’s people begin to shine for Him as they become trophies of grace, truth and freedom in the above seven area’s. Invite the transformation in your life.

#### **God Has Left Witnesses of Himself: Romans 1:18-20**

“18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

The battle for truth stands or falls with the first verse of the Bible. It is the cornerstone of all else that follows. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.. Satan’s assault is leveled relentlessly against the existence, character, and nature of the God of Creation.

Paul returns to this theme in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Creation proclaims the glory, majesty, power, and Divine nature of the Creator. There are immeasurable insights to be learned about God by studying what He has created.

So where does the distortion of truth begin? The big lie involves coming up with a theory of origins that leaves God out. Make no mistake, evolution is a relentless attack on Genesis 1:1. It questions God’s eternal power and undermines His Divine nature. It removes the biblical definition of God from human consciousness, government, and morals. It results in godless living.

But, there is one huge problem. According to Romans 1:19, “that which is known about God is evident within them.... God has left two significant witnesses of Himself. Scholars often refer to the internal witness of God and the external witness of God.

The internal witness of God stems from the fact that God created man in His own image. Every man, woman, and child has an inner void in the shape of God. The human spirit and conscience yearns after God. Nothing else can fill that vacuum with satisfaction. Sin leaves people empty, guilty, lost, and searching.

Creation is the external witness of God. When the quest for truth begins, the manifold lies and massive implausibility of evolution begins to be peeled away during the unbiased search for truth. Multitudes of scientists have come to faith in God as the volumes of unexplainable enigmas in the world of nature continually pile up. There are many thousands of them.

The process is marvelous to behold for those who sincerely search for truth. Many others become hopelessly blind as truth is suppressed by their own greed for sin and immorality. They refuse to acknowledge God for then they need to answer to Him.

This process is often aided by a third witness God has left about himself. I call this “the written witness of God.. If you are reading this post, you are being exposed to the third witness of God. You are reading and studying the Bible. It points to Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation for sinful humanity.

Notice that Paul ends verse 20 by saying that “they are without excuse.. He concludes that those who close their mind and heart to the first and second witness of God will one day stand before Him with no excuse for their sin and unbelief. They can never say, “no one told me.. Why? Because God left evidence of Himself everywhere in creation and imprinted Himself on human conscience.

Romans chapter 1 concludes that the rejection of God is a willful embrace of deception as an excuse for sinful living. Paul goes on to prove this point with a profound survey of human history. He concludes by leveling the charge that God did not reject man, mankind rejected God.

### **Early Stages of Human Apostasy: Romans 1:21-23**

“21) For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

As I look back over history, there were two times that all people knew the God of Creation. The first related to the generations of Adam and Eve right after Creation. The second related to the generations of Noah right after the flood. Both groups of people knew God.

The apostasy started quickly for both groups. Paul said, “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks.. (Vs 21) All it took was a passive attitude toward God and they started to slide away from Him. Satan exploited this attitude of indifference and filled them with the seeds of deception. They thought they were getting smart, but in reality they were foolishly and quickly drifting away from both truth and God. Human logic and reason can quickly turn dark.

It only takes one or two generations for people to abandon God and embrace humanism, naturalism, and pagan religious practices. It only took six chapters in the book of Genesis for humanity to move from walking with God in the Garden of Eden to gross immorality and dancing with demons just prior to the flood.

The history of Israel is filled with cycles of God's people turning from Him and embracing the carnal ways of the surrounding nations. (Read the books of Judges and 1 and 2 Kings) This was usually followed by a severe judgment and then a return to God for a few generations.

Paul's description of the decline of human civilization in Romans 1:18-32 can be applied to nearly every civilization in history. Many went through a time of awakening only to give way to tragic moral and spiritual decline.

This text equally applies to nations today. This is the story of the spiritual and moral drift of modern nations as well. They can move from knowing God to hating God in a relatively short period of time. Satan always exploits human depravity to lead people into sinful bondage and ignorance of the truth.

A key point is found in verse 22. During this entire process and decline, humanity boasts of becoming wiser, but in reality they are becoming fools. Sin can become so blinding that human science and ethics can no longer discern the difference between male and female, good and bad, right or wrong. All lines are blurred as truth is trampled under foot... and this is merely the beginning of the slide. Paul gets more graphic in the next several verses.

We must check our own hearts to detect any indifference toward God. Are you honoring God in lip service only? Are you secretly fantasizing more about sin than enjoying intimacy with God. Do you have a passive attitude toward God? We must guard our own hearts with all diligence.

### **The Tragic Exchange: Romans 1:23**

"23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

Paul now records the tragic exchange. As people began to drift from God, they exchanged Him for the worship of self or some other creature. People who practice idolatry can make gods of nearly anything.

Tragically, there was demonic activity behind this idolatry. (See 1 Corinthians 10:19-20) Satan will do anything to displace and distance the true God from people ... or the other way around. As the drift continued, entire world religions like Hinduism were formed based entirely on idolatry. Soon the true God vanished from human consciousness.

The most significant take away from this verse is that God let them go. He stepped out of the way and turned humanity over to its own lusts and deception.

If you feel distant from God, it may be because you have abandoned Him. You have walked away and He has stepped out of your way. In His place, you have most likely stuffed all kinds of things, including the pursuit of pleasure and success.

Don't expect lightening bolts of judgment. Rather expect silence. He has turned you over to your own ways. But you say, "Terry, God feels so distant!" Bingo. Who moved?

### **Exchanging The Truth About God. Romans 1:24-25**

"24) Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25) For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

As humanity drifts away from God, it enters into a tailspin of sexual immorality and perversion. Paul talks about this moral decline in Ephesians 4:17-19. Sexual addiction can get very dark and ugly.

The reason Paul gives for this decline is found in Romans 1:24; “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.. Whenever the truth about the holy God is removed, the void is filled with vanity.

When Christians backslide, they often slide down the same slippery slope. Greed, lusts, pornography, and immorality are right there to lead them captive into sin. Satan's goal is to separate people from God. It can happen quickly.

Often the deception includes the rationalization that “there are no consequences to sin.. Satan fed that line to Eve when he said, “You shall not surely die.” But as we shall see in the next chapter, God does hold people accountable for their actions.

### **The Full Departure From God: Romans 1:26-27**

“26) For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27) and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”

Paul now points out that as society continues to turn its back on God, He gives it over to degrading passions. Wide acceptance of an LGBTQ value system is a measuring stick of how far society has departed from the truth of the Holy God of the Bible.

Historically, Paul points out this has happened many times in human history. Satan loves to blind people and turn them over to false gods of sex and pleasure. As human depravity embraces all forms of immoral sin, the gospel message becomes more crucial.

Sex can become addicting and twisted to the point of hating the God of the Gospel. But the love of God sent His Son to redeem lost people. The books of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians are testimony of the power of the Gospel to reach lost people. Both societies were fully LGBTQ immersed and God sent the Apostle Paul with the life-transforming message of the Gospel into both Greece and Rome.

### **Human Society Without God: Romans 1:28-32**

So how bad can society get apart from God. I will let Paul describe in his own words what can happen. Notice it affects young and old, rich and poor, male and female alike. When mankind turns away from God there are no boundaries, restraints, or inner compass for good. Things can get very bad.

“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

### **The Whole World is Lost Apart From the Gospel: Romans 1:32**

“32) and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

When studying the Bible, sometimes you need to step back and grasp the whole picture. In Romans 1-6, Paul is on a mission to share the gospel. But before he shares the good news, he first sets out to show that the whole world is lost and worthy of God's judgment.

Many people have a distorted view of God. They see Him as a God of love, but divorce Him from any thought or notion of eternal judgment or hell. Paul is going to hit this theme really hard in the next two chapters.

In Romans 1:18-32, he makes the case that the whole Gentile world is lost. His arguments in these fourteen verses are compelling. Although all mankind once knew God, they willfully pushed the true God of creation aside and pursued false gods and false moral values.

But don't be fooled, this did not mean mankind was non-religious. According to verse 25, "they worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." In other words, mankind created religions to accommodate fallen human depravity. It gave an excuse for mankind to play and pray at the same time. They created religions that promoted and accommodated sin and depravity while abandoning the notion of a Holy Creator God.

Such is the case in our world today. Mankind wants to be spiritual, so the void is filled with false teaching and false religions. Some even look and smell Christian. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. Others take the big step and turn to spiritism, the occult, or other world religions. Satan is eager to fill the religious void within people. His only goal is to deceive them into a Christless eternity.

Paul concludes this section in verse 32 by saying, "although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them..

Paul presents the case that the Gentile world is locked in outright rebellion against God. People cannot save themselves. Man-made religions are not a pathway to God. They lead to judgment and eternal death. They suppress the truth about God in willful unrighteousness. (See Romans 1:18) This is where we have the first mention of God's wrath.

Paul concludes that the Gentile world is lost, but what about the Jewish people. He tackles that question in the next chapter.

### **Two Important Bible Study Methods: Romans 1:32**

"32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

This past weekend I spoke at Men's Retreat. A few of the newcomers mentioned how much they appreciated the way every message was anchored in a full context of Scripture rather than just my own random thoughts or a bunch of stories. I often get the same comments.

Let me take a moment as we work our way through the book of Romans to briefly explain two very different Bible Study tools and approaches to teaching and preaching. Both tools are important to understand and use.

The first is called "Topical Teaching.. This approach takes a certain subject and studies it through the entire Bible. This is very powerful and important. For example, you might be studying the topic of marriage, finances, heaven, salvation, or the three persons of the Godhead.

The goal is to look up everything the whole Bible says about the subject and develop a systematic doctrine on that subject. In the process, it is important to keep the Old or New Testament location of the Scripture in mind. Some things were fulfilled or changed by the ministry of Jesus Christ, but vital principles are still present.

The problem with this approach is that some teachers cut corners and resort to what's called "proof texting" and fail to keep the full context of the verse in mind. When they pull verses out of their context which can twist the meaning. I have met some masterful topical preachers and I have met some very sloppy topical preachers.

The second approach is called "Expository Teaching.. In this approach, the teacher focuses on one book, chapter or context and seeks to faithfully discover what the author was saying. They let the meaning emerge from the text and are careful not to superimpose their thoughts or bias into the text. They let God speak for Himself and try to capture exactly what He was saying in the context, even if it disagrees with their theological bias.

Another important aspect of expository Bible study or teaching is that the text drives the subject matter. If the text talks about it, then the subject is included in the outline. When a subject comes up in the text, the teacher is then free to resort to some topical principles of cross referencing to see how the whole Bible deals with that theme.

For the newcomers to this Daily Bible Commentary, I follow an expository approach in walking through entire books of the Bible. I try to faithfully unpack the meaning within the context and then answer the question; "How does this apply to my life?. I work hard to remain practical and applicable while being faithful to the text.

This approach often exposes false thoughts or notions about God and commonly held ideas. This post is not argumentative or politically correct. We simply try to stay true to the text and discover what God is saying in the context.

As we unpack Romans chapters 2-3, Paul is going to deal with the wrath, judgment, and indignation of God against sin. Get ready for a challenging and thought provoking discussion. Many pastors and teachers blur this topic under the blanket of God's love. but we must be honest and courageous enough to see what the Bible says about this subject. Keep in mind, you will not be arguing with me or any theological bias, you will be wrestling with God and the Bible.

### **Exposing Religious Hypocrisy: Romans 2:1-3**

"1) Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3) But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Having concluded that the Gentiles are lost and condemned before God, Paul now turns to the pious religious community. He condemns them with equally compelling arguments.

His first charge against them is that they are guilty of religious hypocrisy. These were the Jewish elite who quickly agreed with Paul that the Gentiles were sinful and deserving of God's judgment. But they saw themselves as good and righteous, but they were secretly practicing the same things.

He then warns them that they will not escape the judgment of God because it rightly falls on all sinners. Hypocrisy is a very serious sin. The hypocrite is self-condemned.

But what about you and me. Does hypocrisy separate us from fellowship with God. Yes. But even worse, the hypocrite stinks so bad, they prevent others from coming to God. People look at them and conclude, "If that's what Christianity looks like, I want no part of it!"

The bottom line is that religion does not save people. Trying to do good and be good, or keeping some strict religious code does not change the human heart or bring salvation. Being religious and lost is a terrible condition because it gives false assurance.

### **Self-Condemed: Romans 2:3**

“3) But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

We are going to work our way slowly through this chapter. It is here that Paul begins to lay down the doctrine of God’s wrath and judgment. This chapter is virtually ignored by the modern church. It is cloaked under the notion that God’s love will forgive and accept everyone. Paul stood in direct opposition to that reasoning.

After accusing the Jews of religious hypocrisy in the previous two verses (Romans 2:1-2), Paul now asks a rhetorical question, “And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

The answer is obvious, they were self-condemed. Jesus warned about this in Matthew 7:1-2;

“1) Do not judge lest you be judged. 2) For in the way you judge, you will be judged. and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you..

It is amazing how many people find fault in others and condemn them, but they are blind to their own sin. Many times they excuse their own sin for other reasons such as; “I’m Jewish and one of God’s chosen people.. Others may reason, “I’ve been baptized, confirmed, or live a very good life for the most part. Certainly God will overlook my sins.

But the more you pour on your religious status, the greater your own judgment. Those who claim to know God have no excuse for their sin, because they should know better. These people are self-condemed.

### **God of Judgment: Roman 2:4-6**

“4) Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6) who will render to each person according to his deeds.”

Your view of grace and the gospel will have a profound effect on how you live. Some view grace as a free ticket to live and do whatever you please. They reason that because Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, the judgment and wrath of God has been satisfied.

According to verse 5, that is a terrible mistake. It leads to a hard and unrepentant heart. It amounts to storing up God’s wrath against you. God calls us to holiness and not hellishness. Part of the confusion can be erased by understanding the difference between the Judgement Seat of Christ as recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 and the Great White Throne Judgement talked about in Revelation 20:11-15. The Judgment Seat of Christ is for believers. The Great White Throne Judgement is for those unbelievers destined to join the devil and his angels in the lake of fire.

No matter where you stand, it is for judgment. God is the perfect Judge and He will render to every person according to their deeds. Because God is omniscient, (knows all things) He will get the verdict right.



It is at this point that many walk away from the gospel and Christianity. The notion of a God of justice and judgment did not fit into their understanding of an all-loving God. This was true in the days of the Apostle Paul and it is true today.

That's why Paul labors this point so hard in the opening three chapters of the book of Romans. The drift of human civilization away from God outlined in Romans 1:18-32 all shared a common denominator: It was easier for mankind to create religions that tolerated and embraced human depravity than it was to be accountable to the God of Creation.

### **God is 100% Impartial: Romans 2:6-11**

"6) who will render to each person according to his deeds.": 7) to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8) but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9) There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10) but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11. For there is no partiality with God."

When God takes His seat on the judgment seat, He will be absolutely impartial. He will render to each person according to their deeds. To those who consistently do good, there will be glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life. But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, there will be wrath and indignation. The Jewish nation and the Gentiles will be judged by the same standard.

In these verses Paul is merely establishing the character of God when it comes to judgment. Even with instant replay, He will never have a call overturned. He will get it right 100% of the time.

But you say; "I object, no human who has ever lived, except Jesus Christ Himself was without sin! If this text is true, God must condemn and judge everyone!. After a moment of contemplation, you might come back with the observation that "everyone is guilty before God!" I agree. At this point in Romans 1:18-2:11 it looks pretty bleak for humanity. But Paul is not done with his assessment of human depravity yet. He is about to unmask the legalistic "Jew.. Keep reading and studying because hope is on the way. The glorious light of the Gospel is about to shine through the dark cloud of human depravity.

### **Human Conscience and Salvation: Romans 2:12-16**

"12) For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13) for not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14) For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15) in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16) on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

We have been following Paul's arguments that the whole world is lost apart from the gospel. In Romans 1:18-32, he presented the case that every advanced human civilization willfully turned its back on God. His description applied to the pre-flood era as well as post-flood civilizations like the Medes and Persians, Greeks, and Romans. They knew about the God of Creation but willfully trampled Him under foot.

Then in Romans 2:1-11, Paul turned his attention on the religious hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. They knew the difference between right and wrong, and even condemned

others for doing wrong, but they quickly engaged in the same sinful deeds. Paul concludes that there is no partiality with God (Vs 11), so their condemnation is just.

Paul now turns his attention to the morally good who have never had the chance to hear the gospel. (See Romans 2:12-16) These might fit the category of the isolated and possibly the uneducated people of the world. Paul acknowledged that human conscience can be a powerful tool for good. God has put it within every human. It might be defined as an innate intuition about good and bad, right and wrong.

But there are two problems with saying that these people are automatically saved and accepted by God based on human conscience. First, human depravity is universal. Romans 3:10 says, "there is none righteous, not even one.. Though there are some morally good people who follow human conscience, they are still sinners by nature and by personal choice. Human conscience alone has never given birth to moral perfection.

Second, if you start down the road of works based salvation, how do you know who is saved and who is lost. When does a person arrive at salvation. For that matter, if human conscience can save people, why did Jesus die on the cross? Why didn't He just teach people to be morally good and follow their conscience?

My personal take on Romans 2:15-16 is that when the secrets of the human heart are exposed by the light of the gospel, sin and depravity will eternally stain the souls of the morally good. Being good is commendable but it does not pay our eternal debt. According to Paul's gospel, the "wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Human Conscience falls short of producing salvation.

### **A Much Deeper Problem Than Hypocrisy: Romans 2:17-24**

"17) But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18) and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19) and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20) a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21) you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22) You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23) You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24) For "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," just as it is written."Are you ready to wrestle with a profound theological concept? God intended for the Jewish people to be the salt of the earth and the light to the world. But the salt had long since gone bad and the light had gone out. The Law was still the Law, but it lost its status as a moral code for salvation because not even the Jewish people followed it or kept it.

But wait, maybe there was another issue at work under the surface. Maybe the Law was never intended to be a means of salvation. Maybe it was given to expose the sinfulness of mankind and the need for a Savior.

Let's ask the question another way; If God's own chosen people could not keep the Law, who could. The answer is, "only Jesus Christ.. Paul is going to drive these points home over the next few chapters.

He concludes that the Gospel is needed because all people are sinful and lost. (See Romans 3:19-20) It is totally futile to embrace a works-based system of religion in an attempt to save

yourself. Keeping the Ten Commandments cannot save you, because you have already broken many of them.

What Paul is doing in the opening three chapters of Romans is proving beyond all doubt that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 2:23). He systematically looks at every people-group and concludes they are lost. He even pulls the lid off Judaism and shows that God’s own chosen people are lost.

He points out that religion cannot save people because it fails to make them holy. It can make them do better and feel better, but it fails to deliver the personal holiness needed to enter into the presence of God.

According to 1 Peter 1:16, God doesn’t want us to be better, He wants us to be Holy. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the inner work of the Holy Spirit can produce that conversion. Anything short of that will cause the world to mock us just like they mocked Judaism. (See Romans 2:24).

### **The Great Disconnect: Romans 2:25-29**

“25) For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26) So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27) And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29) But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

We as people like achievement and accomplishment. We like external goals and checking things off our bucket list. Once completed, we can forget our task and move on celebrating the fact that we’ve arrived.

But the spiritual life is very different. It is about “being” and not “doing.” It is “inward” and not “outward.. Paul argues in this text that a person can go through the physical act of being circumcised and still be a bad person. God is interested in changing the heart and attitudes and not merely completing a ceremony.

This became “The Great Disconnect” for the Jewish people in keeping the Law. They were good at conforming outwardly, but they had a morally bankrupt character inwardly. They kept the letter of the Law but had no clue about the spirit of the Law.

Paul closes this chapter by arguing that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he is a Jew who is transformed inwardly.

I fear that the same “Great Disconnect” has been carried over into Christianity. Going through the ceremony of baptism, confirmation, first communion or catechism can be good if it is properly taught and understood, but for the most part it has become an empty external ceremony. It has become an outward ritual that does little to change the inward person. It leaves people with a false assurance.

In the broader context of Romans 1-3, Paul is saying that empty religious ceremonies leave people lost. If the inner person has not been changed by the Spirit of God, conversion has not happened. We have accomplished nothing but perpetuated the Great Disconnect.

### **Advantage of Being Jewish: Romans 3:1-3**

“1) Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2) Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3) What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?.

Paul now touches on an important point; “If Jews and Gentiles are both sinful and lost, what is the advantage of being a Jewish?” It is a good question.

It has been said; “To whom much is given, much is also required.. Being Jewish has many advantages. First of all, “they were entrusted with the oracles of God.. The God of Creation not only chose the Jewish people to birth the promised Messiah, He also used them as His channel of revelation to the world.

God's Word was revealed through Jewish prophets. They lived out the story of biblical revelation through the pages of Old Testament History. Many ceremonies like circumcision embodied a picture of the gospel. The Jewish people knew the key stories and many portions were reviewed every year such as the Passover.

I am amazed at the biblical insights Messianic Jews have into the Scriptures. Born-again Jewish people see Jesus throughout the Old Testament and in many Jewish ceremonies. Some even have key insights into end-time prophecies by looking at the Jewish calendar.

But Paul goes on to infer another question; “does the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish people invalidate the Gospel?” Not at all. It merely proves that everyone is sinful and lost and in need of the Savior. The Gospel is as much needed by the Jewish people as the Gentile. Being “born-again” is a personal matter. Each individual must come to Christ.

### **The Teaser: All Hope is Lost: Romans 3:3-8**

“3) What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 4) May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “that you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.” 5) But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) 6) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? 7) But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 8) And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.”

Ok, let me begin with a short confession: This is not my favorite passage of Scripture. Let me also say that this is not an easy line of reasoning to follow. But for those willing to labor over these verses, they yield a significant insight.

Up to this point in his argument, Paul has shown that the whole world is lost and sinful before God. The end result is according to verse 6, God would be entirely vindicated if He judged and condemned the whole world. Why? Because not one person has been good enough to be accepted by God. Every people group, human effort, and religious good will has fallen short of God's holiness.

But wait, God's righteousness is at stake. Here is the catch. If God's justice demands that He judge everyone, how can He find a basis to be true to Himself and still forgive mankind. For certain, it will not be found in human effort or human merit, for all have sinned and left humanity utterly lost with no hope of salvation.

These passages now become “The Teaser.. Apart from something absolutely profound, we are at checkmate and humanity is forever lost. What Paul proposes is so simple a child can

understand it and yet so profound scholars and philosophers have stumbled over it for centuries. Prepare to launch into the depth of the goodness and love of God for lost humanity. Paul is about to transition into the most profound insight in human literature. If salvation cannot be found in human effort or human merit, then it must be found in God Himself. There must be a way for God to accommodate human salvation without reference to human effort and without violating His own righteousness. God had to find a way to do for people what they could not do for themselves.

He unpacks this plan in the next three chapters under the heading of “Justification by Faith.” The mystery of the Gospel is about to come into focus. In the process, the Apostle Paul writes the greatest Christian Apologetic found anywhere in the world.

### **A Quick Survey of the Book of Psalms: Romans 3:10-13**

“9) What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; “10) as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one. 11) There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; 12) all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” 13) Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,” The poison of asps is under their lips”; 14) whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”; 15) Their feet are swift shed blood, 16) destruction and misery are in their paths, 17) and the path of peace they have not known.” 18) There is no fear of God before their eyes.””

After making his opening statement in verse 9 that he had already proven that both Jews and Greeks are all sinful and lost, Paul starts tying together a number of verses from the book of Psalms to support his claim.

What he does is almost comical when the reader understands that the book of Psalms was a scroll in his day. It would have been nearly impossible for a reader to look up every verse. Fortunately for us, there are scholars who have done exactly that and recorded the reference to every phrase Paul quoted.

If you have a good study Bible, the margin of your Bible should record every reference for easy access. This is a rewarding study in the book of Psalms to establish the depravity of humanity. I may also add that Paul was merely scratching the surface. The book of Psalms paints the fallen human heart in very dark and tragic colors. It leaves no doubt that from birth, people are bent on going astray and often very maliciously.

The book of Psalms is amazing. It is both an indictment of fallen human nature and a survey of the goodness of God and a preview of the gospel all at the same time. It stands alone as the most amazing book in the Bible, and Paul was very well-studied in the book of Psalms.

I spend more time in the book of Psalms than any other book in the Bible. It is an inexhaustible treasure chest of truth and insight.

### **Verdict of the Law: Guilty! Romans 3:19-20**

“19) Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

After quoting extensively from the Law in Romans 3:10-16 (Notice that Paul used the book of Psalms as a commentary on the Law), he pointed out that the purpose of the Law was not to

justify, but rather to condemn. The purpose of the Law was to leave every mouth closed in the sight of God and guilty of sin. It was to leave mankind accountable.

Where there is no law, neither is there violation. Driving 90 MPH is not wrong until you come to a sign that says, "Speed Limit: 70 MPH." Suddenly we know exactly where the line is between right and wrong. We also have a basis for police speeding to hand out tickets for violations. We just established a basis of guilt and judgment.

That's exactly what the Law did in the Old Testament. The moral requirements of the Law were suddenly written in stone. They were black and white. They defined good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral. The purpose of the Law was to define sin and thereby expose sinners.

With this in mind, let's now revisit Romans 3:19-20. Paul said the Law left the whole world guiltily and accountable before God, because all have broken the Law. It posted God's moral speed limit, and the police were just around the corner handing out tickets. With Ten Commandments and 612 different ordinances in the Law, it ensured that everybody was guilty of something.

Can you imagine the dismay of someone reading these verses and thinking they were morally good and acceptable to God based on the Law. Within minutes they were written up with handfuls of violations and assigned a court date to stand before God.

Mankind has no defense. Because of the Law, we all stand before God with our mouths closed as the verdict against us is read in court: "Guilty." The Law leaves the whole world accountable before God.

Do you realize what Paul just did in these two verses. He removed that Law as a basis of salvation and justification before God. So this leaves the obvious question; "If good works based on keeping the Law condemns us, what is the basis of salvation?. More importantly, "How can mankind be acceptable to God?"

### **The Thesis Statement of Christendom: Romans 3:21-26**

"21) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26) for the demonstration, I say of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus..

It is going to take several posts to adequately cover these verses, but it is essential to quote them as a whole. We now come to the heart of the Gospel that Paul has been relentlessly working toward in the previous three chapters. Let me raise the obvious question: If all humanity is sinful and lost based on the requirements of the Law, how can God find a basis to forgive people and still remain Holy and Just. (See Romans 3:19-20)

It is not as easy as saying; "God's love can make up the difference" because love does not invalidate justice. For God to randomly forgive some people and condemn others would be cruel and reckless. God has to be consistent and remain true to Himself.

He needs a basis to satisfy His wrath and demonstrate His love in one stroke of the brush on the canvas of human redemption. As long as this text may appear at first glance. Romans

3:21-26 is that providential and ingenious stroke of the brush. This is the link that ties the whole Bible together.

Everything that came before in the Old Testament stories, the Law as given through Moses, the writings of the Old Testament Prophets, right through the Four Gospels are connected to the rest for the New Testament and the book of Revelation by these six action packed verses. This is the "Thesis Statement" of Christendom.

Paul is going to spend the next five chapters unpacking this mystery. He concludes by saying; "38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

### **God's Two Plans of Salvation: Romans 3:21-24**

"21) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; "

I love sharing the Gospel. I enjoy explaining the simple message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ in many different ways. One message, especially for the church-going religious folks is found in these four verses.

In this message, I talk about God's two plans for salvation. That usually sets people on edge wondering if I'm a heretic. First, I talk about the Old Plan of Salvation. I explain that this was based on keeping the Law. I share that if anyone can say they have perfectly kept the Ten Commandments, they would satisfy God's righteousness and He would accept them based on their religious good works.

But then I quickly add. "There is only one problem; verse 23 says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.. That means not one human has kept the Law so as to be saved by that system. The problem wasn't with the Law, it was with us as people. We are sinners by both nature and choice. We missed the mark. We have fallen short.

Usually heads start to nod in agreement, and I recognize they are starting to understand the problem with trying to earn salvation through "do good, be good" religious efforts. The Bible is not opposed to being good, it simply makes it clear that no one has been good enough to earn their own salvation.

It's at this point that I explain God's second plan of Salvation. This plan is based on God's Son coming and fulfilling the Law. But it didn't end there. He went to the cross as a substitute payment for the sins of humanity. He was indeed the perfect "Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world." He paid the debt of our sins by dying in our place on the cross. His resurrection proved that He was God's Son.

But here is the good news: Because He paid for our sin, He can impart to us His righteousness. This is a free gift for those who put faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Bible calls this being "Justified by Faith.. From that moment forward, God the Father looks at us from our position of being "in Christ.. We are saved and accepted because Jesus has redeemed us with His own blood on the cross.

This faith transaction is called being “Born-again.. At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit in-dwells the new believer and begins to change them from the inside out. He works to sanctify the justified. We are forgiven for our sins and a new life begins.

This happened in my life way back in 1973. The Holy Spirit is still working on changing me, but I have now enjoyed many years of fellowship with God based on faith in Jesus Christ. I didn’t come from a church background, so I was a lot better at being a sinner than a saint. Even now, I’m not very religious, but I love Jesus Christ.

So what is your story? Which plan of salvation are you embracing? Are you going to church trying to be good and earn your own salvation, or have you placed saving faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one way of salvation, and that is through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

### **The Message of the Arrow: Romans 3:21-26**

“21) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus..

Sin is the great equalizer of all humanity. The word “sin” as used in verse 23 is an archery term. It literally means “to miss the mark.. In this analogy, God’s holiness as defined by the Law is the bullseye. It is the moral target all people aim at.

Now, having been a competitive archer, I need to admit, there are some really good shooters out there, and there are some really bad shooters; but there are no perfect shooters. Ask any Olympic gold medalist if they have ever missed the bullseye. They will look at you and say, “Are you kidding, no one is perfect!” How many arrows does it take to miss the mark to fall short of perfection. The answer is “just one arrow!”

Sin is not measured by how many of your moral arrows have hit the bullseye or missed the bullseye. There is no such thing from God’s perspective. as “good sinners” and “bad sinners.. God sees all people as sinful and lost. Why? “Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God!” Vs 23

This is where people make the mistake in thinking that being morally good or better than most people will save them. The problem is that God does not compare us to other people, He measures us by the Law. To break one law makes us a Law Breaker.

Let me illustrate by using a chain. How many links of a chain need to be broken for the whole chain to be broken. The answer is: “Only one link.. How many commandments in the Law need to be broken for the whole Law to be broken. The answer is the same: “Only one!”

This is why Paul concluded verse 22 by saying, “there is no distinction.. “... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Why? Because all people are sinners. Pick any time in history. Pick any nationality or ethnic group. Pick any age or gender. For that matter, pick any religious group. The one thing all people have in common before God is “sin..

Now we come to the crucial question; “what is God’s plan to remove human sin?” Is it trying harder. Is it more religion. Is it more good works. Is it being a good humanitarian and caring for others.



Let me be very clear, those are all good things, but they do not remove the stain of sin from the human soul. Sin still needs to be judged. That's what is so profound about the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. On the cross He paid the debt of human sin. That makes Him the only basis for human salvation before the One and Only Creator God. (See Acts 4:11-12)

I challenge you to read and re-read Romans 1-8 until the blinders come off and the Gospel becomes clear. Study until you see yourself as God sees you. Until you recognize that you are a sinner and lost, you will never understand your need for Jesus Christ. You will forever be lost in a works-based system of religion or ethics.

### **God Was On Trial in the Gospel: Romans 3:24-26**

"24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Paul now focuses on a concept that escapes the notice of the casual reader. It is easy to conclude that humanity was on trial in the gospel, but Paul points out that God was also on trial. His justice was at stake. This portion of his argument is absolutely profound and must not be minimized.

Whatever plan for human redemption God chose had to not only pay the whole debt of human sin, but do it so completely and abundantly that it leaves God absolutely just in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. (Vs 26) The sacrifice of His Son on the cross had to measure and even surpass the offense of human sin to be considered propitiatory.

The word "propitiation" means "satisfaction." It has in it the idea that the price had to match or surpass the offense. God could not cut Himself a cheap deal for human redemption and remain just. Let's briefly examine whether or not the price matches the crime of human sinfulness.

Five things stand out in the Bible about the cost God paid for human redemption. First, it was public. It was not a deal cut in secret. (Romans 3:25) Second, the price of human redemption cost God His Only-Begotten Son. God gave His most precious Son. (John 3:16) Third, the cost was higher than any monetary value can calculate. It cannot be measured in terms of gold or silver. (1 Peter 1:18-19) Fourth, the sacrifice satisfied the sin debt of the offense of all of humanity. On the cross, Jesus paid for all human sin, past, present and future. (1 John 2:2, Romans 3:25c) Fifth, the cost of human redemption left God absolutely righteous in giving salvation as a free gift of grace to those who place faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:24-26)

There are many verses we could cite in the Bible to support these five points, but Paul concludes that "God is Just, and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (See Romans 3:26) The Gospel not only provides a way of human salvation, it also vindicates the justice and holiness of God through the process.

There was much more at play in the gospel story than most people ever imagine. God did for humanity what humanity could not do for itself. Salvation was not earned by human effort, it was purchased by Jesus Christ on the cross.

### **The Forbearance of God: Romans 3:25-26**

"25) ... because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time..."

Paul now touches on a concept of God's timing and patience that is seldom talked about or understood. The word "forbearance" as used in verse 25, related to God's response to human sin for the duration of the Old Testament up to the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the cross as the payment for sin.

It can be argued that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament provided a temporary basis for covering human sin, but the work of Jesus Christ on the cross provided a permanent basis for human salvation and the forgiveness of sin. This is the argument behind the book of Hebrews and how Jesus Christ fulfilled everything from being a better priesthood to offering a better sacrifice than the blood of bulls and goats for human sin.

This can get very complicated and confusing, but the Old Testament saints were saved "by faith" looking forward to what was to come in Jesus Christ, and all of humanity beyond that point are saved "by faith" looking back at the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This relates both to forgiveness of sin and eternal judgment. This is what makes the work of Jesus Christ the climax and focal point of all of biblical history.

Though there were cases of God's wrath at certain times in human history like the flood of Noah's day, this is small compared to the eternal judgment to come at the end of the book of Revelation. People from every time and era are awaiting the Great White Throne Judgement talked about in Revelation 20:7-15. That event will happen at the same time for all of humanity no matter when they actually lived on earth.

Peter also used this quality of God to explain His patience with people at the present time wanting more to come to salvation. (See 2 Peter 3:8-13) God will endure human sin for a period of time to allow the gospel to reach more people. But he points out that there will be an end to God's forbearance. Time will run out and all of God's promises will be fulfilled.

This brings up another significant discussion. Why did the Jewish people reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Part of the reason was that they expected the Messiah to come at the end of the six millennium and not at the end of the fourth millennium of biblical history.

This was based on the model of creation itself. God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh. In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter quoted Psalm 90:4 where a thousand years are as yesterday when it passes from God's perspective. His timetable is very different from ours. With the Lord, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

This also illustrates the fact that the church age was a mystery to the Jewish people in the Old Testament. They understood the coming work of the Messiah from Scriptures like Isaiah 53, but the Old Testament was nearly silent about the salvation of the Gentiles and the establishment of the church age and the accompanying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

From a purely Jewish perspective, the nation of Israel and Jewish scholars are just now starting to look for the return of the Messiah. Why. Because we are just now wrapping up the sixth millennium of human history as revealed in the Bible. Biblical prophecy is rushing to a climax from both the perspective of the Jewish nation and the perspective of the church age. We can conclude that God's forbearance is running thin.

### **Death Blow to Spiritual Pride and Arrogance: Romans 3:27-30**

"27) Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28) For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? 30) Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one."

Spiritual pride and arrogance are totally eradicated by the doctrine of justification by faith. It means that God did not choose us because of any merit of our own –our salvation was based on His grace.

We were not born into the Christian faith by being part of a certain family, race, or church. We did not earn our salvation by our own goodness or works. In fact, we did nothing to deserve God's work of grace in our lives. It was a free gift of His grace.

These verses keep me humble and empower me to reach out to all people of all nations and of every social and economic class. It also means that I have brotherhood with all Spirit-filled and born-again believers everywhere. We are one in Jesus. We are all in the family of God and on the road to healing, wholeness, and holiness through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul himself became the primary example of this concept. In Philippians 3:4-11, he explains his pedigree and zeal for God as a Jew. He was even a Pharisee of unparalleled religious legalism. He had every reason to boast, but then he came to the shocking discovery that he was lost. It was then that he came into a faith-based personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If you know his story, you realize that Saul was not seeking Jesus. He was persecuting Christians. (See Acts 9:1-8) But Jesus was seeking Saul.

Philippians 3:7-11 are among my favorite verses in the whole Bible. In them, Paul explains that becoming a Christians cost him everything from his former manner of life, but what he lost was mere rubbish compared to what he gained in knowing Jesus Christ.

The irony of his story is that this former proud and arrogant Pharisee went on to become the Apostle to the Gentiles and was used by God to write much of the New Testament. He utterly repudiated his past and gave Jesus Christ all the glory for who and what he became.

With that simple background, you can now appreciate his question in Romans 3:27; "Where then is boasting. It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith..

His story reminds me that today's adversary might become tomorrow's closest friend in Christ. It affirms the fact that as a Christian I have no excuse for discrimination. The Body of Christ has people from every nationality, gender, and background. I have every reason to be loving, kind, and patient with everyone I meet. My goal in life is to build bridges and not walls as I share Jesus and the gospel without bias as I go through life.

### **Cornerstone of Justification by Faith: Romans 4:1-3**

"1) What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3) For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.""

Most good study Bibles have what are called "chapter titles" at the beginning of each chapter. It is a short summary of the main points of the chapter. My Study Bible starts with Romans 4 with the title, "Justification by Faith Evidenced in the Old Testament." That pretty much nails Romans chapter four.

(By the way, if you want a great personal Bible study tool, write your own chapter titles for each chapter in your Bible. Some are really creative and make an acrostic for the whole book and then use the appropriate letter to start each chapter title. Others limit the chapter title to four words or make them all rhyme. It can be fun and rewarding while forcing you to dig deep into each chapter of the Bible for the meaning.)

Paul spends a lot of time looking at Abraham in chapter four. He basically starts by asking if Abraham was justified by works or by faith? Did he earn his acceptance by God or did God bestow it on him as a result of his simple faith in believing God. That is a fantastic question! Notice, Paul goes back to the Word of God to build his doctrine and does a Bible study in search of answers. What an example of handling the Bible properly. Please build your theology on the Bible and not your own emotions or opinions.

In the process, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 and notes that “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.. This is significant, because Abraham had his share of sin and character flaws. When it came down to it, faith in God became the basis of his righteousness and not his own good life. In fact, Abraham had some big life blunders after Genesis 15, but he came back to his foundation of faith in God as the means of gaining His promises.

Notice that Genesis 15:6 is also cited by Romans 4:9, 22; Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23 as the basis of justification by faith. Small biblical statements can carry significant meaning in understanding biblical truth. Paul is by no means done making observations about Abraham, but he uses Genesis 15:6 as a significant cornerstone of truth.

The implications of this insight are far-reaching. It means that people were justified by faith in Old Testament times in a very similar way as under the Gospel. Granted, Abraham didn't have all the details of the gospel, but he ended up putting many pieces of the puzzle together.

In no uncertain terms, the book of Genesis makes it clear that Abraham was justified by faith and not by keeping religious rituals or the details of the Law. More about that as the chapter unfolds. At this point simply notice how Paul is unpacking the doctrine of justification by faith from the book of Genesis. He was demonstrating what it means to be a Bible Scholar and how to build a biblical doctrine. Be diligent and follow his example.

#### **In Search of Truth: Romans 4:1-2**

“4) Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,”

Paul now sets up his primary argument about justification by faith. He basically asked the question; “Was justification with God earned by human merit, or was it granted by faith?. Paul then went back and applied that question to Abraham in the book of Genesis. He studied the Bible in search of truth.

Let me pause for a moment and make an important observation: What Paul did here is an amazing example of both inductive Bible Study and systematic theology. Rather than give his own quick opinion, Paul went back to the Bible in search of truth. He understood that God would not be silent on this issue. He looked for the biblical principle or biblical pattern taught in the Bible.

This is where the life of faith intersects with the Word of God. Paul became an example for every believer intent on building a solid walk with God on biblical truth. Take your questions back to the Bible and engage in a search for truth. In some cases that search might take years to unfold.

Let God speak for Himself in answer to your questions. Let the Holy Spirit lead you in your study. Take time and be open to new insights and be honest with your interpretation of Scripture. Don't let your emotions or your religious background blind you.

Don't be surprised if the Bible exposes theological bias you were taught years ago. I am constantly pulling out weeds in my thinking I have blindly cultivated for years. I am learning to put God's Word above theological dogma and many times that creates an inner battle.

Let me point out that there were huge ramifications to the search for truth that Paul was pursuing. If Abraham was justified by his own goodness and works before God, then the whole concept of work-based religion is established in the Bible and the gospel is void. However, if Abraham was sinful and lost, but God justified him by his faith, then works-based religion is invalid and the Bible sets up a system of justification by faith.

At first glance, the whole Law system and Judaism itself looks heavily works-based. Everything from circumcision to keeping the Law looked like self-righteousness was the basis of salvation. What Paul laid out in the balance of Romans 4 was both radical and revolutionary. It actually got him martyred by the zealous religious community.

### **The Illustration of David: Romans 4:6-8**

"6) just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7) "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD will not take into account.""

Paul now takes a short detour from his discussion of Abraham and looks at a quote from King David. In these verses, Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2. He does so to point out that David also embraced justification by faith and not works. It is instructive to note that Psalm 32:3 starts by saying, "when I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away..."

And rightly so, because David had plenty of sin in his life. Though it was said that he was a man after God's own heart, he lied, committed adultery, tried covering up his sin, and then had Uriah killed. He also disobeyed God and had the people numbered bringing a terrible judgment on Israel. If righteousness was based on keeping the Law, David was eternally lost.

But David openly confessed his sin and turned from it. His story is that he didn't walk away from God, he walked away from his sinful ways in his pursuit of God. I see David as a great example of 1 John 1:5-10. He did not live in denial of his sin, nor was he content to be out of fellowship with God.

This small reference to King David should give all of us hope. Rather than living with condemnation, he discovered the power of confession and repentance and rebuilt a close and intimate walk with God. It is almost like he had a preview of the gospel. (See 1 John 2:1-3) This same grace and invitation extends to you and me. Jesus not only died for our sins, He lives to be our advocate. That means that "He defends us before the Father." Don't let your sin drive you from God, rather confess and repent of your sinful ways and run to God. Become a man or woman after God's own heart no matter what your past looks like.

### **Which Came First, Faith or Circumcision? Romans 4:9-12**

"9) Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." 10) How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11) and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Paul now returns to the life of Abraham and makes an important observation. He answers the question; "Which came first; faith or circumcision?". He actually answers the question in Romans 4:10-11, but let's be diligent and go back to the book of Genesis and color in the full story.

The story starts in Genesis 12:1-4 when Abraham was already seventy-five years old. God called him to leave his own country for a land that God would give to him and his descendants. Over the next ten years and three chapters, Abraham obeys God but he remains childless. Do you ever feel like God is slow about His promises.

Then in Genesis 15:2-3, Abraham points out to God that he was still childless. No matter how many blessings God gave to Abraham, it would amount to nothing because he had no descendant to inherit the blessings. God then again confirmed his promise to Abraham again.

"4) Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5) And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them."

And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6) Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." Genesis 15:4-6

Notice verse 6, Abraham was reckoned as righteous based on his faith in God. The only problem was that God did not explain to Abraham that the promised child would come through Sarah. Over the next two chapters and about fifteen years, Abraham takes things into his own hands and Ishmael was born. By his own sincere efforts... Abraham got it wrong!

Then when Abraham was now 99 years old, God again appears to him and confirms His promise through Isaac. It was at that time God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision as a seal of the promise. (See Genesis 17:22-27)

However, the next few chapters point out that Abraham was not done with his fleshly ways yet. He continued to mess up and again lied about Sarah being his sister. (See Genesis 20) Sorry to point this out, but Abraham was still far from perfect.

Why is this important? Because righteousness was reckoned to Abraham through faith...

because through his own fleshly efforts he got it wrong over and over again. Our fleshly efforts to be good and save ourselves always fall short. God is the author of our salvation. We do not earn it through our own religious efforts or ceremonies like circumcision. We are saved because God is faithful in and through our lives and He has provided the means of salvation through His Son.

At first glance, the story of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 11-25 may seem insignificant, but it is packed with many insights. It provides the foundation of the doctrine of justification by faith, gives a foreshadow of the Gospel, hints at the Great Commission and I would argue that the doctrine of sanctification is also present. These chapters are foundational to the rest of the Bible. More and more insights will emerge from these chapters as you walk with God and grow in your faith.

### **Two Descendants of Abraham: Romans 4:11-13**

"11) and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. 13) For the promise to Abraham or to his

descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

Paul now makes a profound observation about Abraham. He had two lines of descendants. The first were physical descendants who inherited the sign of circumcision. The second were spiritual descendants who followed in the steps of faith of Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

This becomes significant in verse 13 where Paul points out that the promise to Abraham or his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not made through the Law. Rather the promise was made through faith.

Paul labors this point again in the book of Galatians. In chapter three he points out that the Law was given through Moses and not Abraham. (Galatians 3:17-18) The Law was given 430 years later, therefore it does not go back and invalidate the promise given to Abraham through faith. I would encourage you to study the whole book of Galatians to glean this distinction.

In both the books of Romans and Galatians, this becomes the backdrop to the discussion of justification by faith and the whole concept of walking in the Spirit versus the flesh. The big question relates to whether God's plan of salvation relates to being a physical descendant of Abraham and therefore Jewish or trusting in the plan of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Does keeping the Law bring salvation or does the Gospel bring salvation?

Why is this important. Why does Paul devote so much time and space to this discussion. It ultimately boils down to a works-based system of religion or a faith-based plan of salvation. Are you trying to save yourself through your own good works or are you putting faith in Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation?

Ironically, every world religion goes back to a works-based approach to salvation. They are based on some form of rituals, creeds, or keeping rules and regulations. They leave people lost and hopeless in failed self-effort.

Why? Because Romans 3:23 says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.. Religion and good works do not save people! God saves people through His Son. (John 3:16. Only faith in the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ brings salvation.

The implications of this discussion are very deep and include many questions like: “How much of the Old Covenant do believers enter into?” And, “Does the Church become spiritual Israel in the New Testament?. Or, “What’s the difference between walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit?”

As you can see, we are merely scratching the surface in this basic study, but I would argue that the question of the basis of salvation through works or faith is the heart of the discussion. Until this issue is settled the other points are irrelevant. Many people end up arguing theology as an excuse to avoid the personal implications of the Gospel.

### **The Gospel to Abraham: Romans 4:13-15 and Galatians 3:8**

“13) For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14) For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 15) For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,.

We are going to take a very small bite at first in order to capture the essence of these verses. Paul makes the point that the promise to Abraham that he would be heir of the world was through faith and not through the Law.

Let's step back and ascertain from the text why that was the case for Abraham. Notice that Paul points out that the purpose of the law is to bring wrath and punishment to those who violate the law. Look at Romans 4:15. By contrast, we could inject that the purpose of faith and grace in these verses is forgiveness and life.

We know that Abraham had his share of character flaws. He lied twice about Sarah being his wife, had a child with Hagar, and then tried to get God to condone his fleshly ways and make Ishmael his only heir.

Now let me ask a crucial question: "What Law had Abraham broken?" You quickly respond by saying, "He broke the Ten Commandments.. I agree in theory, but there is a huge problem with that answer: The Ten Commandments had not yet been given. They were given 430 years later through Moses. Again, let me remind you that Romans 4:15 says, "where there is no law, neither is there violation.. You cannot break a law that does not exist!

The implication is that Abraham was not justified by keeping the Law, but neither was he condemned by breaking the Law. According to Romans 4:16, Abraham had a very simple relationship with God based on faith and grace. He was justified by faith. He believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

But this was not an excuse for reckless or sinful living. Unlike the surrounding nations, Abraham had faith in a moral and holy God. He purposed to obey and please Him. You could conclude that faith in God changed Abraham into a new man.

Galatians 3:8 goes so far as to say; "And the Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, All nations shall be blessed in you." Isn't it interesting that the word "gospel" suddenly shows up related to Abraham?

We now need to ask, "What exactly was Abraham believing?" The answer according to Romans 4:13 is "the promise." Technically, it was the promise of the coming Messiah who would redeem all of mankind from the curse of the fall and the curse of the Law. Abraham most likely came to believe that he was in the lineage of the Messiah and was saved by simple faith in God's plan to redeem mankind.

### **Walking By Faith: Romans 4:16-17**

"16) For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17) (as it is written, "A Father of many nations I have made you.") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

As mentioned earlier, Abraham had two lines of descent. One related to physical descendants, the other related to spiritual descendants who follow in the faith of Abraham. Most people understand this and follow in the faith of Abraham.

But let's have some fun in this post with a little Bible Trivia. Let me start by saying, a little bit of faith goes a long way. So, how many physical descendants did Abraham actually have. Most people respond by saying two: Ishmael and Isaac. But when God restored Abrahams body through faith, he did an amazing job. It seems that Isaac grew up with many younger brothers.



Genesis 25:1-2 records a detail that most readers miss. After Sarah died, Abraham married again. Let's look at what the Bible says; "1) Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. 2) She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah.. Altogether Abraham had eight sons, but Isaac was the son of promise. This reminds me of Ephesians 3:20; God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all we ask or think. Now look at the end of Roman 4:17 again. "... in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." God certainly did give life to the dead, and called into being what did not exist. Abraham did have as many descendants as the stars of the heavens for number and he became the father of a multitude of nations and many kings came from him. (See Genesis 15:5 and Genesis 17:6-7) When God spoke to Abraham in the above two texts of Scriptures, everything He said looked impossible. He was old and had no children. Later in Genesis 18:14, the Lord had to remind Sarah that "nothing was impossible with God.. She was well past the age of childbirth. To the natural eye, it looked impossible.

But God does not call us to walk by our natural eyes. We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith adds God to the equation and takes Him at His word. Abraham now becomes an example of what it means to walk by faith. It is understanding that what God promises He is able to do, and he is able to do it abundantly. (See Romans 4:20)

Let me make a closing point. Faith is taking God at His Word and not holding Him hostage to our wishes. What God says, God does. What God does not say, He is not obligated to perform. Faith goes back to the Word and promises of God. Make sure your faith is anchored in the Word of God and not in your emotions.

#### **An Example of Saving Faith: Romans 4:17-22**

"17) ... in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18) In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be." 19) And Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20. yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21) and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22) Therefore also it was credited to him as righteousness."

Living by faith in God has been denounced as being irrational, illogical, unreasonable and sometimes even reckless. Those charges are true only if God does not exist. But if God does exist, then ignoring Him and His Word is the utmost foolishness.

The above text says that when God spoke to Abraham about the promise of a son through Sarah, he took inventory and concluded that humanly speaking it was impossible. He was very rational about his plight. But then He took his eyes off from all of the odds stacked against him and instead began to fix his focus on God and His Divine power.

The text includes a list of some of his considerations and conclusions about God. From verse 17 we discover that He realized that God gives life to the dead, and calls into being what does not exist. Suddenly his plight seemed small compared to the God who created everything from nothing and then brought life into being. By the way, that is the distinguishing characteristic of the God of the Bible. He is the Creator God!

Then from verses 20 and 21, he began to focus on the character and power of God. He concluded that if God makes a promise, He had the power and integrity to keep His Word. God would not and could not make a promise He was unable to keep. Suddenly Abraham realized that the fulfillment of the Promise was God's responsibility.

The results of this conscious focus on God were amazing. Instead of becoming weak in unbelief, he grew strong in faith and started giving glory to God. For the first time Abraham started trusting God and very possibly discovered the power of praise and worship.

He stopped trying to do it himself through fleshly efforts. That had failed with Ishmael. Instead, it was at this point he switched his focus and thinking from himself to God. We could say that Abraham came to the end of himself and simply started trusting God. Soon his faith started growing. Through this new focus and way of thinking, he became strong in faith!

I have discovered that faith grows the same way for me. The more I focus on myself or the bad news in the world today, the more cause I have for despair and feelings of futility. But the more I learn about God from His Word and the amazing stories about Him in the Bible and living testimonies from others, the more my faith grows.

In the process, Abraham was justified by faith. He became an example of what it means to live by faith in God. Notice, he did not merely have faith in faith or hope in hope. Many make that mistake. That is the plight of the atheist and the agnostic. Abraham anchored his faith in God. The same is true of salvation. Instead of trusting in our religion or good deeds to save us, we put our faith in God and His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. John 1:12 says we receive Him through faith and thereby become children of God. We trust God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God becomes our anchor and foundation.

#### **Righteousness Put On Our Account: Romans 4:22-25**

"22) Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 23) Now not for his sake only was it written that it was reckoned to him, 24) but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25) He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

Some translations use a different word for "reckoned." Another version of the New American Standard Version uses the word "credited." The Revised Standard Version says "counted to him." The idea is that the work of Jesus Christ is transferred to our account through faith in Christ. It is reckoned or credited to us by faith. He becomes both the payment of our sin debt and the basis of our righteousness standing before God. We no longer try to gain God's acceptance by our own merit.

In this context, Paul is trying to illustrate that the gospel is received by the same kind of faith that Abraham had. We believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

"23) He was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." The moment we put our faith in Him, everything He accomplished is credited to us. I recognize there is a lot about Jesus Christ we need to accept by faith. Everything from His virgin birth, His being the sinless Son of God, and His being the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world are all part of the Gospel story. John 1:1-4 includes His true identity as the Creator, and 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 includes the fact of His resurrection.

The truth is that Jesus Christ was God doing for humanity what we cannot do for ourselves. We are not saved by our self effort, good deeds, religious activities, or family heritage. We are saved by personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The whole story of Abraham was recorded for our sake. His character flaws, his struggles, his fleshly efforts and finally his total surrender to faith in God embodied exactly how we are saved and justified by faith. In the same way he finally came to simple faith in God, we also need to come to the place of putting our faith in Jesus Christ.

The miracle that followed next for Abraham was that he was justified by his faith in God and Isaac was born. The miracle that follows for us is that we are justified by our faith in Jesus Christ and we are born-again. A new life begins for us and all the benefits of being justified by faith become ours.

Stay tuned, Paul begins to describe those benefits in the next chapter.

### **Peace With God: Romans 5:1**

“1) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”

This might be the most glorious verse in the entire Bible. Because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, we can experience total peace and reconciliation with God based on faith. From that point forward, we become part of His family and He deals with us as with sons and daughters.

I do not take peace with God as an insignificant thing. For years as a non-believer, I was at enmity with God and the world around me. I was fighting an inner war. All of that ended the evening I surrendered to Jesus Christ and invited Him into my life as Lord and Savior. It was the beginning of a new life.

As Romans Chapter Five unfolds, Paul begins to count the many benefits of being justified by faith. It culminates in Romans 8:1 by saying; “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Why? The next three verses explain how the law of the Spirit of life in Christ set us free from the law of sin and of death. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. We need not live under guilt and condemnation. We can come to peace with God, with ourselves and with other people.

Paul’s own life is an example of justification by faith and coming to total peace with God. In Philippians 3:4-11 he shares his personal story. His inner battles raged until he met Jesus Christ. Neither religion, nor good works, nor trying to keep the Law on his own merit satisfied his inner itch or calmed his inner battles, even though he was trying really hard. (See Philippians 3:4-7) But when he came to Jesus Christ, he found a value beyond his wildest dreams. He was finally at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. (See Philippians 3:8-11)

The same can happen for you. All of the benefits of Romans 5-8 can be put on your account through grace and faith in Jesus Christ. You can be “born-again” to a whole new way of life! I encourage you to read these chapters in the book of Romans very slowly with a pen or highlighter in hand. If these things are not happening in you, it’s time to place personal faith in Jesus Christ and invite Him into your life.

### **Amazing Grace: Romans 5:2**

“1) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

Justification by faith in Jesus Christ not only brings us peace with God, but according to verse 2, our faith also places us into a different kind of relationship with God. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross to pay our debt of sin, we can now enter into a standing with God based on

grace. It is no longer a relationship of enmity and wrath; but rather one of forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

Grace can be defined in many ways. Some look at grace as God's unmerited favor or undeserved kindness. That is a great definition for the process of a lost person coming to salvation, but it falls short of describing what it means to live by grace as a child of God. My personal definition of God's daily grace relates to "God's divine power through the Holy Spirit made available to help me do what in and of myself I could not and most likely would not do." Grace is therefore the strength to live as I ought, rather than the freedom to do whatever I want without consequence. Many people have a confused notion of grace.

Grace therefore has in it the concept of God's favor toward us in Christ. Recognizing God's favor in my life despite my failures transformed my view of God and the Christian life. It broke the condemning voice of the accuser of the brethren in my life and helped me distinguish the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and restoration when I fell into sin. (Compare Revelation 12:10 and John 16:7-15)

The study of grace in the Bible is a worthy endeavor for every child of God. Grace is mentioned very few times in the Old Testament, but it is an abundant theme in the New Testament. Living by the Law and legalism is very different from living by grace and the walk in the Spirit. Both are based on God's holiness, but the age of grace in the New Testament is accompanied by the indwelling Holy Spirit as mentioned in Romans 5:5. The Holy Spirit is given to help us and not hurt us.

The longer I am a believer and study God's Word, the more I realize that grace and walking in the Holy Spirit are inseparable doctrines. They go hand-in-hand. Hence, when we talk about "the age of grace" and the "age of the indwelling Holy Spirit" we are referring to the same biblical phenomenon.

This helped me erase the erroneous notion that grace is a ticket to sin. To the contrary, I now understand that grace is both the invitation and the provision to move away from sin and bondage and into freedom and holiness through the Holy Spirit.

Grace also places us in a standing with God based on love and patience as this process unfolds in our life. Grace means He is for us and not against us. He is with us for the long haul as a loving Father as the Holy Spirit brings us to maturity and completion.

Developing a biblical understanding of grace ushered me into an intimate relationship with God as my loving Father. I can now cry out "Abba Father" in sincerity and truth. (See Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:14-17) The biblical meaning of Grace radically changed my view of God in the way He relates to me as His child.

### **The Purpose of Trials: Romans 5:3-5**

"3) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Another amazing by-product of salvation and justification by faith is that trials and tribulations are not summed up by futility. They have value and purpose. Because God is and He is working out His plan and purpose in our lives, He uses everything that comes into our lives to build us. He wastes nothing.

In these verses, Paul says that tribulations bring about perseverance, and perseverance proven character, and proven character hope, and hope love. He points out that the Holy Spirit is active in our inner lives using everything in our external circumstances to build godly character in us. This might be new thinking for some people, but Paul returns to this theme again in Romans 8:26-30. In these verses he says that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. The Holy Spirit never takes His eyes off the ultimate plan for our lives.

Let me make an observation from these two contexts. God is more concerned about “who we become” than He is about “what we become” in this life. His goal for each of us can be summarized as godliness and maturity in Agape love. He wants us to be conformed to the image of Christ.

This helped change my focus on God’s will for my life and Christian living as a whole. I used to get all hung up on “doing the right thing.. Now my focus is more on “becoming the right person.. Though I cannot control outward circumstances in my life, I can attach proper meaning to them and turn them over to the Holy Spirit for my growth and character development.

This understanding brings the Christian life into focus. It gives meaning, direction, value and purpose. I can rejoice in my tribulations and struggles knowing God can and does use them to change me into the man He wants me to be. My job is to cooperate with that process.

#### **Introduction to the Holy Spirit: Romans 5:5**

“and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Justification happens the moment we place saving faith in Jesus Christ. At that instant we are born-again. We become a child of God. But it is not a cold or static event. It is more like tipping the first domino that starts a chain reaction in our lives.

Everything Paul talked about in Romans 5:1-5 begins to unfold immediately –and much more.

Why? Because at the moment of salvation we are both sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is a New Testament phenomenon that does not come through the Law or in the Old Testament. This is the promise Jesus made to His disciples. (See John 14:16-21)

From the moment of salvation forward, the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the believer. He begins the process of changing them from the inside out. This is often referred to as the doctrine of sanctification. He works to bring our character and conduct into harmony with our justification. Romans 5:5 says that this includes pouring out the love of God within our hearts. The word “love” in this verse is “agape.” I simply call this “the God kind of love.. Both 1 John 4:8 and 16 say that “God is love.” This kind of love is connected to the very character and nature of God. It is part of His essence.

In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit; “22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23. gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.. This is a broader panoramic view of Romans 5:8. It is also a character portrait of Jesus Himself.

As the sanctification process unfolds, each believer should begin to reflect this image of Christ. Paul hints at this in Romans 8:29-30. God predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son.

A common mistake many young Christian. make is focusing more on the power of the Holy Spirit “through them” rather than the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit “in them” producing

personal holiness and Christ likeness. I am learning that the “through them” is intimately connected to the “in them..

Let me be candid. God can work through a dumb mule to accomplish a given work, but He doesn't ordain mules into full-time fruitful ministries. In the same way, the Holy Spirit can do amazing things through anyone, but a life of fruitfulness comes from abiding in Jesus and His Word on a daily basis. Read the full context of John 14-16 and the promised ministry of the Holy Spirit. Notice the emphasis Jesus made in John 15. He wants us to abide in Him. He wants us to bear much fruit.

If you are a new Christian, I encourage you to start an extended biblical study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as soon as possible. If Satan cannot stop a person from becoming a Christian, he will work overtime to keep them ignorant, timid, or confused about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Make walking in the Spirit a lifelong pursuit.

Read and listen to what others have to say about the Holy Spirit, but make this subject a lifelong study of your own. As you read your Bible over and over again, be diligent to underline, highlight, take notes, and compare everything the Bible says about the Holy Spirit.

I have been a believer since 1973 and this subject is more meaningful, precious, and insightful for me than ever before. God is constantly coloring in the picture with compounded new understanding. I am confident He will do the same for you as well!

#### **God's Plan For Human Salvation: Romans 5:6-11**

“6) For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7) For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11) And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

No matter how a person seeks to be justified before God apart from faith in Jesus Christ, they will fail. Physical strength is too weak. Moral goodness is too corrupt. Man made religion and good works fall short. Human knowledge and wisdom abandon God. Philosophy and psychology often feeds and excuses sinful bondage. Collective consciousness amplifies human depravity. Individual goodness misses the mark. Science and ethics often lead to wrong conclusions while accepting a complete absence of boundaries. Any and all of the above leave mankind lost and at enmity with God. They are empty pursuits. They lead to futility. Paul argues in Romans 1-3 that humanity is lost and deserving of God's wrath. (Compare with 1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

But God had a plan for the redemption of humanity apart from any of the above. It is summed up in the gospel and the concept of justification by faith. I simply quote our text for today: “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for a good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having now been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only

this, we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation..

There is no other way to God but through simple faith in Jesus Christ. Why. Romans 6:23 summarizes. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Salvation is a free gift from God based on saving faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Why search for another way when God has provided the only way?

### **The Doctrine of Original Sin: Romans 5:12-14**

"12) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned— 13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come."

Paul now makes an important observation. about the entire human race. He establishes what is often called "The Doctrine of Original Sin.. Not only was the guilt of Adam's sin passed on to all of his descendants, so was a tendency or predisposition toward sin. This text establishes the point that all people are sinners both by nature and by personal choice.

It appears that both the guilt of Adam's original sin and the nature to sin are both passed on through the male at the time of conception. This is what makes the virgin birth of Jesus Christ so important. Because God was His Father, Jesus Christ had neither the stain or guilt of Adam's original sin over His life, nor did He have a sin nature. He was in every way sinless.

In the same way, because Mary was His mother, Jesus was therefore part of the human race and could become a substitutionary atonement for all of humanity. He was the sinless Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) He was a "type" of Adam with a clean slate. (Romans 5:14)

But Paul makes another point in these three verses that is very significant. In both Romans 3:19-20 and 4:15, he had stressed the point that the violation of the Law is the basis of establishing guilt and placing the sinner under God's wrath. The problem is that the Law was not given until Moses. So does that mean that all people who lived prior to the giving of the Law were innocent?

In tackling this objection, Paul points out that death reigned over all humanity from Adam to Moses. (See Romans 5:14) People from every generation died. How can we explain this apparent inconsistency.

The answer is found way back in Genesis 2:16-17. God's original command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the consequence of death, were given to Adam prior to his transgression. It was his willful breaking of this basic command that placed him and all of his descendants under the condemnation of death. The doctrine of the universal guilt of sin on the entire human race is actually illustrated by the physical death of all people who lived prior to Moses and the giving of the Law. It serves to punctuate the Doctrine of Original Sin.

This brings us to another commonly asked question; "What about the innocent?. What about newly-born children who are in a state of innocence because they have not committed personal sin? The Bible constantly points out that the original sin of Adam is passed on at the moment of conception. For example, in Psalm 51:5 David observes; "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Again, I stress that because of the virgin birth, Jesus Christ was

the only human ever conceived without the stain of Adam's original sin and the resulting death sentence on His life.

In these three verses, Paul convincingly argues both the concept of original sin and the concept of a sin nature in all people. The result is that all people are sinners and worthy of the judgment of death. (See Romans 3:23 and 6:23) When properly understood, this doctrine underlines the urgency of the Gospel.

#### **Contrast Between Adam and Christ: Romans 5:15-17**

"15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16) The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

Paul now makes a crucial comparison between Adam and Christ. He starts both verses 15 and 16 by saying that the free gift through Christ is not like the transgression that came through Adam. They are similar in that Adam's transgression affected the whole human race, just like Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. (See John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2. They are different in that death spread to all people through Adam's transgression, but the free gift of salvation is only applied to believers. Justification is by personal faith in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Romans 5:17 amplifies this point when Paul said; "... much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

I recognize there is disagreement from strict Calvinists on this point, especially if they hold to the concept of the limited atonement of Christ. With circular reasoning they argue that Christ died only for the elect, because in the end His atonement will only be applied to the elect.

Though there is some merit to the final point, I would say that Romans and the whole Bible consistently teaches that Jesus died for the whole world, and salvation is reckoned only to those who are justified by faith. This is the thrust of the book of Romans through Chapter Eight.

Looking back, we will discover that those justified by faith were the elect, but looking forward is much more difficult to identify them. I have met many among the frozen chosen who show no evidence of conversion. By the way, I consider myself a biblically-balanced Calvinist. I agree with much of what Calvinism teaches but I am not dogmatic.

I find no value in arguing these points. It is much more productive to simply preach the Word than it is to argue theology. Our call is to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world while trusting the Holy Spirit to convert those whom Jesus is calling to Himself. This call has never been more urgent or needed than today. God's people need to carry the good news of the gospel courageously into the world and our culture today. The Great Commission is as binding today as in any time of church history.

#### **Contrast Between Death and Life: Romans 5:17-19**

"17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all



men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."

Paul now begins to focus on an important distinction between Adam and Christ. Just as Adam's sin and transgression became the basis of death and condemnation for the whole human race, so the condemnation of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross became the only basis of forgiveness and justification for the human race. There is no other means of salvation but through faith in Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:8-12)

Let me erase a confusion some have based on these verses. The transgression of Adam did bring death to the entire human race, but the death of Jesus Christ on the cross does not mean that every human is automatically saved. However, the atonement of Jesus Christ did open the door for salvation and justification by faith to those who believe in the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ through personal faith. According to Romans 5:19, there will be many who come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul now begins a transition into the second part of the gospel message. Though it was the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His burial that became the basis of human redemption and forgiveness, it was His resurrection that became the basis of new life imparted to every believer. This will be Paul's theme as we move into chapter six.

This is what separates Christianity from every other world religion. They all had founders who died, but only Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead by the power of God. Christianity is not about death, it is about life!

Paul states this point very clearly in Romans 5:17. Let me quote the verse for emphasis. "17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."

Note the contrast between death and life! Adam brought death, but Christ brought life. But notice that this life is to those "who receive the abundance of grace." There needs to be a personal faith response to the gospel. Believers are the ones who will reign in life through Jesus Christ.

From this point forward in the book of Romans, Paul is going to focus on the new life through the Holy Spirit that begins to emerge in every true believer. Christianity is about life and not death. It is about forgiveness and not wrath and condemnation. It is about our future and not our past. It is about the Spirit and not our flesh. It is about being set free and not enslaved. It is good news and not bad news.

#### **Contrast Between The Law And Grace: Romans 5:20-21**

"20) The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21) that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul closes Romans Chapter Five with one more contrast. This time it is between the Law and grace. He stresses again that the Law came in that transgression might increase. The Law was not intended to save people, but rather to prove the guilt of sin beyond all doubt and to show that they are worthy of death.

By contrast, grace abounded all the more and paved the way for righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ. Just as the Law reigned bringing death, much more grace reigns unto eternal life.

These two verses put the final nail in the coffin of works-based religion. Any effort to be accepted by God on the basis of keeping the Law or self-righteousness is futile. It only amplifies how bad we have missed the mark. When measured by the Law there is no question of my sin and guilt.

I join Paul in celebrating amazing grace. I put all my faith and hope in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross as the payment for my sin and the basis for my salvation!

### **Refuting the False Notion of Grace: Romans 6:1-2**

“1) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”

Paul had many critics of his teaching about grace and justification by faith. The main objection was that Paul was teaching that grace nullified the Law thereby granting license to sin and lawlessness. By removing the Law he was throwing out a call to righteousness.

But Paul did not throw out the Law. He merely pointed out that the Law was never intended to be a means of salvation. The purpose of the Law was to establish the lost and sinful condition of humanity. (Review Romans 3:19-20)

The Law paved the way for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the need for an alternative means of salvation apart from self-righteousness. The Law became the door-keeper of grace and the doctrine of justification by faith.

But I must concede to the critics of Paul. Many Christians wrongfully view grace as an excuse for sinful living. They have a false and twisted understanding of grace.

Stay tuned as Paul unpacks the true meaning of grace and explains the full meaning of the gospel. Romans 6-8 explains how grace is the enemy of sin and the pathway to freedom, righteousness, holiness, and walking in the Spirit. Paul is about to explain the dynamics of what it means to be born-again to the newness of life.

### **Erasing The Baptism Confusion: Romans 6:3-7**

“3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7. for he who has died is freed from sin.”

There is a cloud that hangs over these verses. Some churches believe in what is called “Baptismal Regeneration.” They believe that the church's ceremony of water baptism is what brings salvation, then they look at these verses to substantiate that claim.

But this runs contrary to Paul's argument in the book of Romans that justification is by faith and not human works. If circumcision did not save Abraham in the Old Testament, how could the ceremony of baptism save people in the New Testament? (Review Romans 4:10-17)

But there is another baptism accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation talked about in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says; “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one

body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.. This is indeed what Paul is describing in Romans 6:3-7.

At the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit places (baptizes) the new believer into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We die with Him so that we might also live with Him. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.

It is nearly impossible to read this text without remembering the words of Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3:1-16. He says that being “born-again” requires both a physical birth and a spiritual birth. (See John 3:5-6) The conversation culminates with John 3:16 where personal belief or faith in Christ is the basis of receiving eternal life. No place in the text is a ceremony by a church mentioned. In fact, the church did not come into existence until at least Acts chapter two. Human Religion always tries to place itself as the doorkeeper of heaven. This is a false and twisted view of Scripture. Those who take the time to study the full context of Romans 5-8, discover the ministry of the Holy Spirit is mentioned multiple times, while the church is not mentioned at all.

There is no doubt for even the casual reader of the book of Romans to conclude that Paul is referring to the wonderful phenomenon accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the moment of personal saving faith in this context. He baptizes the new believer into Jesus Christ. The act of water baptism is merely an outward picture of this inward reality accomplished by the Spirit of God.

This opens another sad but troubling conversation. Over the years I have asked countless people what is the basis of their hope of salvation. Many tragically point to the fact that they were baptized as an infant into the Christian faith. I point out that they are believing in something not taught in the Bible. The Bible always places personal saving faith in Jesus Christ before water baptism. (See Acts 8:36-37 and Acts 16:29-34)

Never does the Bible confuse the doctrine of justification by faith with a human ceremony. In fact, as Christianity spread, Paul refrained from water baptism so as not to confuse the gospel message. See 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 as a powerful testimony of this fact.

If you are one of those who are religious but not born-again, I would encourage you to read the gospel of John and the book of Romans over and over again while asking the Holy Spirit to clarify the gospel. This confusion may be the single greatest error Satan is using in traditional churches to keep people blind to the truth of the Gospel. Personal saving faith in Jesus Christ is the only basis of salvation taught in the Bible.

#### **The Mystery of Being Baptized into His Death. Romans 6:3-4**

“3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life..

Paul now introduces one of the most mind-bending mysteries in the entire Bible. The moment someone becomes a believer and is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, they metaphysically enter into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ with Him.

This truth became real to me years ago back in high school when I was memorizing the book of Galatians. For years Galatians 2:20 became my favorite verse; “20) I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life that I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." Notice that Paul again talks about the mystery of "being crucified with Christ."

Peter said something similar in 1 Peter 3:18-22. Only in this text he compares being baptized into the body of Christ with Noah and the ark going through the judgment of the flood. As we read that text, a beautiful picture develops as a comparison between Christ on the cross and the ark going through the flood.

Just like God told Noah to prepare an ark for the judgment of the flood, so God prepared His own Son for the judgment of the cross. But who was saved in the days of Noah? According to Hebrews 11:7, it was only those who had the faith to enter the ark. Noah preached and offered a way of salvation for people to repent and enter the ark, but only Noah and his family believed and were saved. Only eight people went through the judgment of the flood in the ark.

So let's take another big step in our thinking that clarifies this text. Who went through the judgment of the flood. The answer is everyone in that generation including Noah and his family. But what was the difference. They were safe because the ark endured the judgment of the flood for them. By faith they entered the ark.

"And corresponding to that"... , every human will face the judgment of God's wrath on sin because we have all sinned. However, the believer goes through that judgment "in Christ." He is our "ark" to bring us safely through. By faith every believer is metaphysically placed "in Christ" on the cross, in the grave and in His resurrection. Believers will not face God's future wrath because by faith we stand before Him baptized "into Christ."

Notice in Genesis 7:1. it specifically says that God closed the door of the ark behind them. He sealed it. In the same way the New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit is given as our "seal of our salvation.. (See Ephesians 1:13-14. He baptizes us into the body of Christ and seals us safely in the ark of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13. This whole transaction is based on faith in the simple message of the gospel.

Jesus became our ark to bear the judgment of sin on the cross just as the ark bore the judgment of the flood for Noah and his family. They went through the judgment of the flood just like everyone else, but they were safe because they were in the ark. So we pass through the judgment for our sin "safe in Christ."

The moment we place faith in Jesus, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into His body which became our ark to bear the judgment of the cross for us. We are safe because by faith we were "in Christ" on the cross when he was crucified. I believe this is a small slice of what Paul was saying in Romans 6:3-4.

#### **In The Likeness of His Resurrection: Romans 6:4-5**

"4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,"

If you understand these verses, there is a two-way transaction that takes place. We are baptized into His death on the cross so that our sins are totally paid for, but He goes way beyond that and places us into His resurrection life. We died with Him so that we might live with Him.

But the meaning goes even deeper. Prior to being born-again by faith in Jesus Christ, the life that we lived was basic "bios" or "biological life.. It could be understood as life on a physical level. But when we place faith in Christ, He gives us what the Bible calls "Zoe" life. This could be

called "Spiritual Life." This enables us to "walk in the newness of life." This is the God kind of Life.

But you say, "I object, I still look and feel very human.. So did Jesus, but without sin and Satan being His master. We become like Him. Being born-again means our very essence changes. At the moment of salvation, we are filled with the Holy Spirit. From that point forward, it is possible for us to live and walk in the Spirit. Unfortunately, our flesh is still alive as well and this can set up the inner war Paul talked about in Galatians 5:16-24.

We could say that the Christian life brings on a metamorphosis every bit as real as the caterpillar crawling into a cocoon. It is a mystery, but soon new life emerges. The butterfly looks very different from the caterpillar that made the cocoon. From the moment it spreads its wings, it leaves caterpillar life behind. It will never crawl through life again.

So also the Christian has every resource in Christ to leave their old life behind and walk in the newness of life. Just as we come to Christ by grace through faith, we daily step into our new life the same way. The process of spiritual growth is a precious journey that leaves the old behind and embraces everything new in Christ.

### **Don't Be a Gravedigger: Romans 6:5-7**

"5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7) for he who has died is freed from sin.

This is a difficult truth to embrace experientially. Paul says we were united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. That means we have been freed from sin because we died with Christ. We are no longer slaves. Sin is no longer our master... unless we let it rule over us by ignorance or default. We now have a new Master in Jesus Christ and we can walk in the newness of life in the Holy Spirit.

But most of us are gravediggers. We go back over and over again and dig up our fleshly sinful past. We are now locked in an inner battle. Every time a temptation comes our way we rationalize and start thinking; "I'm just a sinner saved by grace." And what do sinners do? They sin! So we become gravediggers in our thinking and empower sin and our flesh. We give them life.

But that little statement is not true for a born-again Christian. The truth is: "I was a sinner that was saved by Grace, and at that moment I became a saint that can live in freedom through the Spirit, but I am still capable of sin if I decide to become a gravedigger and empower my flesh. When I discovered the truth of the above two paragraphs, my victory level radically changed, mostly because my excuses and deception were gone. Don't get me wrong, I am far from sinless, but I am no longer powerless. I am not a slave to sin. When temptation comes, it is no longer a compulsion, rather it is a willful act of disobedience. It happens because I lose the inner battle of truth and surrender to my will and my flesh to sin.

This is part of what Jesus talked about in John 8:31-32 where He said, "you shall know truth and the truth shall make you free.. It is so easy to rationalize and explain away what Jesus said in Romans 6-8, but the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to speak the truth. It is our job to embrace the truth and reckon ourselves as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6-8 will be a frequent part of your journey to maturity, sanctification, walking in the Spirit, and practical holiness. I have come back to these chapters over and over again since

1973 when I trusted in Jesus. I no longer argue with the principles laid out in these chapters. My only goal now is to love Jesus and embrace truth. When temptation comes my way, and it often does, I now try to surrender as quickly as possible to Jesus. I want to honor Him as Master.

### **A Place Where People No Longer Sin: Romans 6:5-11**

“5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7) for he who has died is freed from sin.”

I no longer recall who the speaker was, but I remember being hit over the head with a point that radically changed my thinking. He said, “I can take you to a place where people are no longer sinning. I can show you men who no longer lust. You can walk a group of beautiful cheerleaders past them and they will not so much as blink!”

He had my attention. The idea of being immune to sin or temptation was preposterous to me. I even remember laughing to myself, but my scorn was short-lived.

It was almost like he looked right at me and said; “So you don’t believe me. Ok, get in my car and let’s drive through a cemetery! I guarantee you, those people are dead to sin!. I sat for a moment absolutely stunned by the truth of his observation.

He then went on and explained the principle Paul was talking about in this text. When we consider ourselves as dead in Christ, it immediately takes the sting out of sin and temptation. I have learned the value of two questions when in the face of temptation: 1) How would this affect Jesus? 2) What response would this temptation get in a cemetery. The truth of those answers can suck the life out of sin and temptation.

The impact of this reasoning is the backdrop of Romans 6:5-11. Notice verse 11 says; “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” God wants us to consciously consider ourselves as dead to the master of sin and temptation, but alive to Jesus as our Master.

It is up to each one of us to wrestle through this principle and use it as a weapon in the face of sin. When you resolve yourself as being dead, sin no longer has power over you. You need to apply this specifically to your pet sins and temptations. It takes time, but it works. My list may be different from yours, but we all need to conduct sin funerals in our life and crucify our flesh.

### **Kick Sin Off The Throne Of Your Life: Romans 6:12-14**

“12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

I find these verses to be very interesting in the discussion of free will and human responsibility. Notice that the text makes us responsible to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. It seems that we have a choice in presenting the members of our body to serve sin as instruments of unrighteousness, or to present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead. We can dedicate ourselves as instruments of righteousness.

The reason is found in verse 14; “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.. So we are forced to ask the question; “What is the difference between the two systems?” Paul takes the next 2 1/2 chapters to answer that question.

We are about to discover that a life of self-righteousness under legalism and the law is dependent on the flesh and self-effort for the results. The problem is that our flesh serves the law of sin and death. (See Galatians 5:19-22) This results in the deeds of the flesh.

On the other hand, grace opened up the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit and walking in Divine enablement. Believers can walk in the Spirit. The human spirit empowered by grace and the Holy Spirit produces totally different results. (See Galatians 5:22-24) The results are the fruits of the Spirit.

When you compare the two lists they are radically different. I remind you that grace is not the freedom to do whatever you want, rather it is the strength to live pleasing to God. As Christians we have the means to kick sin off the throne that governs our life. I view this as part of the maturing and sanctifying process.

### **Winning The Battle In Your Thinking: Romans 6:15-16**

“15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

16) Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”

Sin and the flesh have a tendency of thinking logically to wrong conclusions. They look at the doctrine of grace and conclude: “If grace abounds where sin abounds, all I have to do to get more grace is sin more!. This twisted reasoning distorts grace into a ticket to sin without consequence. This is an example of false reasoning.

But Paul is quick to denounce this faulty thinking. He points out in verse 16 that you become a slave of the one you obey. You can become a slave of sin or you can become a slave of righteousness. The former leads to death, the latter leads to a life of freedom and godliness. Chapter 7 points out that every human has this battle. Chapter 8 makes it clear that the only solution is yielding to the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

But these verses also highlight the fact that sin usually involves a mind game. It is like the original sin when Satan tempted Eve in Genesis Chapter Three. He engaged her in a fierce mind game as he planted all kinds of lies in her thinking. Then he stood back and let the venom of lies and deception entice her into sin.

I have found this to be true in my life as well. The battle begins in the mind. Renewing the mind with truth is an important process to victory. (See Ephesians 4:21-25) One of the ploys you will face involves Satan trying to twist the doctrine of grace into a license to sin.

### **Become a Slave to Righteousness: Romans 6:20-21**

“I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness..

Paul now uses the common illustration of an indentured servant or slave to illustrate how people become slaves. A person wishing to learn a trade or pay off a debt could sell themselves or work for a contracted period of time free of charge. The contract was so binding that the Master could sell the indentured servant to another to receive payment. This is a practice that dated back to Old Testament times. In practice these people voluntarily became slaves. Some made good choices and some made tragic choices, depending on who they became indentured to.

In the same way, Paul said that when a person presents the members of his or her body to impurity, they become slaves to sin. It has amazed me over the years how many people are in bondage to sins like anger, greed, drugs, gambling, or sexual immorality. It only takes a few reckless sessions watching pornography for a person to become addicted. Paul concludes that sin is self-enslavement just like the indentured servant who picked a horrible master.

Unfortunately, Christians are not exempt from servitude. I have worked with many over the years who are living defeated lives. They are in secret bondage to sin. So what can they do. Paul shares several principles in Romans 5-8 that are really simple and practical. This one is as well. It simply says, instead of serving sin, start serving God. Instead of doing bad, do good. Instead of feeding your flesh on pornography, start feeding your soul and spirit on uplifting material. Download an audio Bible on your smartphone. Listen to Scripture. Discover audio books by John Maxwell and others. Turn your downtime into a university for success. Better yet, build a library of good books and start reading!

Why? Because the opposite is also true. You can become a slave to righteousness. This can snowball into a sanctification process. It is amazing what can happen when you choose your entertainment carefully. You can become a slave to righteousness.

### **Go Figure! Romans 6:20-21**

“20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21) Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.”

Paul now asks an interesting question; “What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?” Have you ever stopped and took a serious look at a lifestyle of sin? It may look good on the surface, but give it enough time and it is painful and destructive. Let me get you started in the thinking process.

The angry person may enjoy taking their wrath out on others, but the truth is that no one likes being around a bitter person. Bitterness is as bad or worse than cancer. It eats at people and destroys them.

Getting drunk and enjoying the party life looks fun, but in the end alcohol and drugs bite back really hard. They have destroyed many lives. Addictions are devastating!

What about pornography and sexual promiscuity. They have destroyed many marriages and left numerous people with sexually transmitted diseases. They have also fueled the abortion industry.

There is no sin that makes a good master. Every sin has consequences. But you say; “Not so Terry, I know many people who embrace sin and seem to be doing fine.” The Bible says “there is pleasure in sin for a season, but the end thereof are the ways of death..”

At my age, I now have the perspective of longevity. Paul was right, “The wages of sin is death!” Sin is like a cat playing with a mouse. It looks cute but the mouse never gets out of it alive.

### **Focusing Two Doctrines Together. Romans 6:22-23**

“22) But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Many believers believe in God for eternal life, but they fail to believe in Him for freedom from sin in this life. But notice in verse 22, they are linked together. The moment a person is born-again



the sanctification process begins. All of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and through His resurrection are placed on the believers account and they start now.

According to Romans Six, all the benefits of salvation start here and now and not merely after we die and go to heaven. It took several years for the blinders to fall off and I was able to understand and embrace the truth of Romans 6:22. Let me say it again, Salvation is not only for then and there, it is also for here and now.

This is where two theological terms meet and embrace. Sanctification is the daily work of the Holy Spirit in this life to cleanse, free from sin, empower, and fill the believer with amazing fruit and gifts for spiritual service.

Justification is the eternal state of the Christian in a standing of acceptance and favor with God for all eternity based on the work of Christ imputed by faith at the moment of salvation. Let me try to compare the two.

Justification places us in the family of God; whereas sanctification keeps us in fellowship with God. Justification relates to the baptism of the Holy Spirit placing us into the body of Christ, whereas sanctification relates to the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. Sin in the life of a believer does not remove us from the family of God, but it does grieve the Holy Spirit and interrupts our fellowship with God. Justification is God declaring us righteous in Christ; whereas sanctification is the Holy Spirit washing and making us righteous.

This may sound confusing, but these two precious doctrines work together to bring freedom and fruitfulness in this life and guarantee eternal life as a free gift from God to all those who are born-again through faith in Jesus Christ. I embrace both of these doctrines.

Romans 4-5 establishes the doctrine of Justification by faith. Romans 6-7 wrestles through the doctrine of Sanctification through the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 weds the two together in perfect harmony.

This is very simplistic, but Calvinists generally see the Christian life through the lens of justification, while Armenians generally see the Christian life through the lens of sanctification. The sovereignty of God and the idea of eternal security are consistent with the doctrine of justification. Human responsibility and the idea of falling from grace are consistent with the doctrine of sanctification. The tension disappears when both lenses are placed together and brought into focus with each other. Similar things could be said about the evangelical and charismatic divide.

Let me challenge your thinking a bit. The science of eye glasses and contact lenses are based on one lens. They are very helpful, but have limitations. By comparison, the technology of microscopes, binoculars, and telescopes are based on two lenses focused together. The potential is amazing.

Here is the take away: God intends for us to focus both of these doctrines together. It opens amazing new insights into the mystery of salvation while erasing all kinds of confusion. I have been a two lens follower of Jesus for the past 35 years. That gave me the freedom to be a Kingdom Builder rather than riding one particular theological horse.

### **Payday! Romans 6:23**

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We all need to pay close attention to this verse. It applies to all of us. Why? Because it says, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.. Romans 6:23 talks about “Payday!”

Notice Paul opens this verse by saying “The wages of is death.. Wages relate to pay or compensation for work. The just compensation for sin is death. We all deserve God's judgment of death because of our sin. Each of us have earned it!

But look at the rest of this verse; “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.. You might ask; “Why is it a free gift?. Simply because we did not earn it. None of us have. Jesus earned it for us on the cross. He paid for our sins that we might be justified by simple faith in Him.

Salvation is therefore a free gift. We certainly did not earn it through our own goodness because we are all sinners. We cannot buy it because we are all morally bankrupt. Salvation is a free gift that can only be received by faith in Jesus Christ.

This verse is a summary of the gospel. Jesus wants to give you His free gift of salvation, but you need to receive it. He will not force it on you. You can settle for payday or you can opt for God's amazing grace.

### **The Permanence Of The Marriage Covenant: Romans 7:1-4**

“1) Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2) For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3) So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 4) Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

Paul now takes three big steps backwards and gives another illustration about the binding power of the Law. He does it by looking at the marriage covenant. He points out that the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living. If for any reason she marries another man while her husband is alive, she is an adulteress. Only death of a spouse frees a woman to marry again. Even our marriage vows today often say, “until death we do part.”

In verse four, Paul applies this principle to the Christian life. He points out that “in Christ” we were made to die to the binding power of the Law. We are like the widow set free from her marriage vows because of the death of her husband. We are now free to be joined to Christ. The Law no longer has jurisdiction with condemnation power over us. “In Christ” we are free from the law so that we can now love, obey, and serve Jesus. He is like our new husband.

I embrace this illustration, but I shudder at the number of modern scholars who say this text has no bearing on the binding nature of the marriage covenant among Christians. Though I agree that Paul's primary purpose was to illustrate how the death of Christ set us free from the Law, nowhere in this text does he minimize the permanence of the marriage covenant for Christians. To the contrary, by using this illustration to communicate to Christians, he is underlining the importance of the marriage covenant.

The biggest detriment of modern Christianity is our weak view of marriage and the family. In a very real sense, the modern church is doing as much to erode marriage as the cornerstone of culture as any anti-culture movement of our day. Paul was not doing that in this text. He had a very strong view of marriage and the family.

### **Introducing The Tension Between The Flesh And The Spirit: Romans 7:4-6**

“4) Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5) For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6) But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

Paul now introduces the battle alive within every believer. It comes down to the tension between the flesh and the spirit. Through Christ, we died to the Law which is dependent on the flesh and self-effort to be good and do good. The sinful passions aroused by this system end up producing fruit for death.

But those who cultivate the walk in the Spirit begin to produce fruit unto God. We can serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Rather than righteousness being forced from the outside in by the Law, it is birthed from the inside out through the indwelling Spirit. The two approaches are radically different.

No matter how hard you try to discipline your flesh, control your flesh, or reform your flesh, it is still human flesh and is allied with sin. In Galatians 5:24, Paul argues that the only productive recourse for the flesh is to crucify the flesh. Apart from walking in the Spirit, all religious endeavor is destined for failure not because the Law is bad, but because human flesh is sinful and devious. We need to walk in the newness of the Spirit.

#### **Deadly Nature of Sin: Romans 7:7-12**

“7) What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 8) But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9) And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10) and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11) for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12) So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

This text helped me understand how sin can use the Law to entice the flesh into violation. Paul shared how he had no problem with coveting until he read in the Law, “Thou shall not covet.” Sin used the Commandment to produce coveting of every kind within him.

The same can be said for the rest of the Ten Commandments. Where there is no law there is no consciousness of violation. Sin is almost personified in these verses. It is like the warning God gave to Cain about his anger, “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

This is very similar to Psalm 36:1 which says; “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.. Vers. 4 goes on to say; “He plans wickedness upon his bed; he sets himself on a path that is not good; he does not despise evil.” This is a picture of sin putting an evil thought or temptation into the mind and the flesh takes over to fantasize all kinds of wickedness.

James 1:13-16 fills in the colors of the picture. It says; “13) Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own

lust. 15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16) Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” (James 1:13-16)

This is only too familiar because it happens to all of us. As long as we live in a fleshly body, sin lurks in the shadows. If you think you are immune, you are a fool. The thing that makes Romans Seven so profound is that Paul is confessing his own battles with sin. The battle continues all the way through Chapter Seven, and then Paul points the way to victory in Chapter Eight. Nearly every Christian brings sinful strongholds or bondage into the Christian life. Do not be discouraged, failure is not your destiny. Read on because God has a plan for freedom.

### **The Mysterious Nature of Sin: Romans 7:11-23**

“11) for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12) So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13) Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.” 14) For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15) For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16) But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17) So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18) For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19) For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20) But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21) I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22) For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23) but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

I now venture to ask a question that I have pondered often but have no definitive answer; “What is sin?. I know it is disobeying God, breaking the Law and coming short of the glory of God, but I am asking about the very nature of sin itself. What gives it such universal appeal and influence over humanity?

Is sin a spirit? Is it a force? Is it a mere concept? Is it the very fallen nature within humanity that is bent toward evil? How is it aligned with Satan? Does it behave like a spiritual disease or virus bringing eventual moral decay and death to every human host. How can Paul attribute blame to it in Romans 7:13? Does it possess the attributes of personhood? These questions intrigue me. Notice Romans 7:17 says, “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” He repeats himself in Romans 7:20; “But if I am doing the very thing which I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.. Is Paul passing on personal responsibility and blaming sin for his negative actions? His distinction is very compelling.

More important, as a Christian I understand the concept of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but notice that Paul uses the same terminology for sin indwelling the human flesh. What does that mean? How did it get in there? Can I get rid of this unwanted parasite?

Notice in verse 14, Paul says his flesh is in bondage to sin. Sin is so aligned with the human flesh that it has the power to influence and control the flesh in an evil bent. He then goes on in verses 21 and 23 to talk about a “principle” and “the law of sin.. How does this influence our understanding of the nature of sin?

I do know that sin is our foe and not our friend. Its method is deception. Its playground is human misery and suffering. Its ultimate goal is death and eternal damnation. It is universal throughout all of humanity and it is very powerful and effective in promoting human depravity.

So why is this an important discussion? Well first off, a basic principle of warfare is, "Know thy enemy!". I believe that Romans 6-7 were written to help us know our enemy. Ephesians 6 was written to help us put on our armor and prepare us for battle. But second, Romans 7 makes it clear that this is every human's story. You are in this battle with sin whether you like it or not! As we shall see in Romans 7:24-25, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only cure for this wretched human condition.

### **Paul, An Example Of Contrition: Romans 7:24-25**

"24) Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

This text identifies something that separates the Christian from the average person. Paul had genuine contrition and repentance toward his sin. He did not revel in his sin, he despised it. He wanted victory over his sin.

So what is contrition. Isaiah 66: 2 says; "2) For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.. Contrition defines the genuine and humble person who shuns the flesh while seeking Jesus and righteousness.

Paul was tired of being a double-minded man. He was ashamed of his flesh ruling his life and was ready for the sanctification which comes through Jesus Christ and the inner work of the Holy Spirit. Paul was eager to leave Romans Seven behind so he could step into Romans Eight. No more excuses, he was ready to walk in the Spirit!

### **Defeating Plaguing Guilt and Condemnation: Romans 8:1-4**

"1) Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3) For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4. so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

These verses are worth committing to memory. They state clearly that the believer is no longer under condemnation from God. Why? Because the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus set us free from the law of sin and of death. Jesus accomplished by becoming flesh what no human was able to do. He fulfilled the Law. He was sinless.

In doing so, He became the spotless lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. His death on the cross paid the full sentence of human sin. He took the sting of death out of the Law. He made it possible for the believer to look into the eyes of the accuser of the brethren and say, "covered by the blood of Jesus!" And, "Redeemed and Forgiven by God!"

But there is more. He also made a way for sinful people to live holy lives by walking in the Spirit. (See vs 4) The Holy Spirit fulfills the Law. So does the believer who is walking in the Spirit. Just as Agape love is the fulfillment of the Law, so is the full fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:23 closes the list of the fruit of the spirit by saying; "against such things there is no law!"

If you have been justified by faith and are still plagued with fear, anxiety, plaguing guilt, or feelings of condemnation, it's either because you don't understand the gospel or because you are listening to the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10) The Holy Spirit gently convicts to bring confession, repentance, forgiveness and restoration. He never brings up past sins already confessed.

By contrast, the accuser of the brethren is relentless. He heaps guilt and condemnation on people. He leaves them feeling hopeless, helpless, dirty, and unworthy. He will try to convince you that your past is so bad that God cannot forgive you.

I have worked with believers who are so deceived they are convinced they have lost their salvation and are worse than dung before God. Some battle severe anxiety disorders.

I teach them how to grab their Bible and resist the enemy by speaking truth into his defeated face. Part of that truth is Romans 8:1; "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. If you need more Scripture to stand on, proceed immediately to Romans 8:31-39. Trust me, they will be self-explanatory when you read those verses.

The only thing that remains for the genuine believer who is under plaguing guilt and condemnation is to forgive themselves. This is a major challenge for some people. But if God can forgive you, you can find the grace in Christ to forgive yourself. This text in Romans 8 is very significant for your journey to personal wholeness.

(I heartily agree with Terry! I have experienced the condemning words of the enemy of our souls myself and I have encountered countless others who avoid Jesus because they believe the enemy's lies that Christianity is about condemnation. I even had business cards printed up for use in street evangelism with just two Bible verses on them: John 3:17 and Romans 8:1.) -dj

#### **Start Walking in the Spirit: Romans 8:4-8**

"4) so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5) For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8) and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Keep in mind, Paul was answering his own question from Romans 7:24; "Wretched man that I am! Who shall set me free from the body of death?" Can a Christian rise above fleshly sin and walk in righteousness. Paul's answer was; "Only through saving faith in Jesus Christ and learning how to walk in the Spirit!"

The promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit is what separates the Old Testament from the New Testament. (See John 14:16-18; Acts 1:4; Acts 2:39) The work of Jesus Christ on the cross paid the penalty of sin and broke its power. The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost became the inner resource for every believer to be set free from personal sin and bondage and have a way to walk in power, victory, and holiness.

Putting off the old self and learning how to walk in the Spirit is a process. (See Ephesians 4:20-23; Colossians 3:1-10) It should be as normal for every born again Christian as a toddler learning how to sit up, crawl, walk, and eventually run.

I recognize there is much controversy and confusion about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but the New Testament consistently points to the walk in the Spirit as the key to personal transformation, spiritual growth, victory over sin, and a life of fruitfulness in serving God. If you

doubt me, go back and read Romans 8:1-17 over and over again. You are either setting your mind on the flesh or the Spirit.

The very definition of a carnal Christian is a believer who is still living and controlled by their flesh. (See 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, Romans 8:5-8) If Satan cannot stop a person from becoming a Christian, he will do everything in his power to prevent them from discovering and entering into the walk in the Spirit. Carnal Christianity is his playground, but Spirit-filled believers are his demise.

Those who grow into a biblically mature walk in the Spirit become the mighty men and women of God in the body of Christ today. They far surpass the mighty men of King David because they become mighty in Spirit. (See 1 Chronicles 11-12) The mighty New Testament soldiers of God have armor and resources available to them totally unknown by David and his men. (See Ephesians 6:10-20)

You have no excuse to remain ignorant, childish, or carnal. No matter your church background, you can place personal saving faith in Jesus Christ, pick up your Bible, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill and guide you into the truth. Begin to study the ministry of the Holy Spirit and what it means to walk in the Spirit.

Then in obedience to God, shut off your media entertainment and get up and start serving God. Most of your growth will come on the front lines of service where you will soon be stretched and desperate for the Holy Spirit to work through you. "In Christ" through the gifting and empowering of the Holy Spirit you have unimaginable potential to become a mighty man or woman for God. Get serious with Jesus and start your journey today!

(When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray and He gave them the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:1-13, He concluded that teaching by instructing His disciples to ask for the Holy Spirit –and I believe He meant every day!) -dj

### **The Amazing Ministry Of The Holy Spirit: Romans 8:9-11**

"9) However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10) And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11) But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

As we focus on the walk in the Spirit as emphasized by Paul in Romans 8:1-17, I want to step back and take a broad look at the ministry of the Holy Spirit from the whole Bible. The following is an A-Z overview of the ministry of the Holy Spirit available to every born again believer and every local church in which Jesus has ownership.

### **SO WHO IS HE?**

- A. He is the author of Scripture. II Peter 1:20-21, II Timothy 3:16-17
- B. He is the promise of the Father. Acts 1:2-5, Acts 2:33, 38-39
- C. He is the gift Jesus offers. Acts 2:38-39, John 14:16
- D. He is the power of the witnesses. Acts 1:8; 4:30-31
- E. He is the conviction of the sinner. John 16:8-11
- F. He is the seal of the saved. Ephesians 1:13-14
- G. He is the regenerator of the believer. Titus 3:5-7

### **DO YOU WANT TO HEAR MORE?**

H. He is the One who indwells every true believer. I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20

I. He is the distributor of the gifts. I Corinthians 12:4-7; 11

J. He is the abiding anointing that teaches. I John 2:20, 27; John 16:13

K. He is the source of the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23

L. He is our basis for unity. Ephesians 4:3-4

M. He is our access to the Father. Ephesians 2:18

N. He is the guide to the church leaders. Acts 13:1-4

**WELL, HAVE YOU EMBRACED HIM.**

O. The stiff-necked can resist Him. Acts 7:51

P. The sinful believer can grieve Him. Ephesians 4:30-31

Q. The insensitive Christian can quench Him. I Thessalonians 5:19

**SO DO YOU REALLY NEED HIM?**

R. He is the “Daddy Cry” of the adopted. Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:15

S. He is the means of true worship. John 4:23-24

T. He is the inspiration of the singer. 1 Corinthians 14:15, Eph 5:18-21

U. He is the unction of the intercessor. Ephesians 6:18-20

V. He is the overflow of God’s love. Romans 5:5

W. He is the possession of true believers. Romans 8:5-11

**SO, CAN YOU LIVE WITHOUT HIM?**

X. He is our helper when we are weak. Romans 8:26a, John 16:7

Y. He is our intercessor when we are discouraged. Romans 8:26

Z. He is our assurance when we have doubts Romans 8:16, and He is our inner strength and power when we are empty. Ephesians 3:16

**CONCLUSION.** Oh, what can I say – even though the alphabet is over we have just scratched the surface. Let’s indulge a bit more: He is the member of the Godhead that perfected creation (Genesis 1:2), He came upon key Old Testament saints (Psalms 51:10-11), He filled many key figures in the narrative story (Luke 1:41, 2:25-26) He overshadowed Mary at the conception of Jesus to make the incarnation possible (Luke 1:35), and He descended as a dove upon Jesus at His baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). He is also the One currently at work building and fitting together all the believers into a Holy and awesome dwelling for God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The important question is not “how much of the Holy Spirit do you have, but rather how much of you does the Holy Spirit have?” There is only one baptism of the Holy Spirit placing believers into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), but many fillings of the Holy Spirit empowering us for life and service (Ephesians 5:18).

The question is not whether you are a fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostal. The question is: “Are you born again through faith in Jesus Christ and walking in the filling and power of the Holy Spirit.. (Acts 1:8, Galatians 5:16-24)

Resist the temptation to change your understanding of the Holy Spirit to match your experience, background or theology; instead invite the Holy Spirit to change you to match your calling in Christ Jesus as defined in God’s Word. (Romans 8:1-39; Titus 3:4-7) Friends, this is as simple as I can make it, but it will take you a lifetime to understand and apply it. Just don’t let anything or anyone hinder your sincere effort to walk in the Spirit toward fruitful maturity in Christ!

**Every Man’s and Every Woman’s Battle. Romans 8:5-8**



“5) For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8) and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

The battle between the flesh and the spirit is every man's and every woman's battle. For the non-Christian, the outcome is inevitable because the spirit of man died at the fall of Adam and Eve. Hence Paul describes the tragic condition of human depravity in Ephesians 2:1-4. He observes that the non-Christian is dead in their trespasses and sin, sold out to the world, influenced and controlled by the prince of the power of the air, and chasing after fleshly indulgence. It may look different for every person, but the general story is the same.

When a person becomes a Christian, the human spirit comes alive and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Scholars are actually divided over the true meaning of walking in the Spirit. Should it be translated as “walking in the spirit” or “walking in the Spirit?”. The former understanding favors a model where the renewed human spirit is filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, but still retains ultimate control. The latter understanding favors a model where the indwelling Holy Spirit is in total control.

I favor the understanding of “walking in the spirit” for several reasons. First, human free will is not lost for the Christian. We still have the freedom to decide. Second, the Bible paints a picture of gradual growth and maturity for believers over time. This would not be the case if the Holy Spirit gained absolute control at the moment of salvation. Third, this understanding opens a three way battle for control of a person's life. Let's look at the three possible ways your life can be governed and make decisions.

First, the human flesh can sit on the throne and be controlled by hormones, sin, and bondage. The result is carnality and sinful bondage. Second, the human soul can sit on the throne and be controlled by emotions, logic, or reason. The result is that a person's worldview and overall life philosophy sets the direction of life. This is why some non-Christians can be decent people. Or third, for the Christian, the renewed spirit can sit on the throne and be influenced and controlled by the Holy Spirit. The result is living in tune with God and in obedience to His Word and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

For most people, there is constant inner tension over which part of the human makeup reigns on the inner throne. It can even shift between the flesh, the soul or the spirit throughout the day. With spiritual growth and maturity, walking in the spirit should become the predominant mode of operation, but the tension is ongoing. The flesh does not give up easily. All it takes is being cut off by a rude driver and a flash of anger can ascend to the inner throne.

The above explanation seems to fit both Romans 8:5-11 and Galatians 5:13-26. I believe this picture is also the best explanation of Philippians 2:12-13 where the believer is admonished to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Christian growth is a lifelong process. We are encouraged to take it seriously and work diligently at this calling. (See 2 Peter 1:4-11)

The big takeaway from Romans 8:4-17 is that salvation accompanied by the indwelling Holy Spirit is the big game-changer for the Christian. We do not need to live a life of failure or sinful bondage. God has provided everything for our journey to practical holiness, spiritual maturity, and unimaginable fruitfulness in this life. “In Christ” your future can be very different from your past.

### **True Assurance Of Salvation. Romans 8:12-17**

“12) So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” 16) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

I am no longer quick to listen to the testimony from someone's lips, rather I like to watch the testimony from their life. Are they living according to the flesh or are they living by the strength of the Spirit. The proof is whether or not they are starting to put to death the deeds of the flesh. I do not look for perfection. That is a byproduct of legalism. Rather, I look for real progress and inner spiritual life.

According to verse 14, those who are being led by the Spirit of God are the true children of God. This lines up well with 1 Corinthians 2. Do they have a growing hunger for God and a comprehension of spiritual truth? Is God a mere theological concept for them or the very source of inner life? Is their approach to God rational or spiritual?

In verses 15-16, Paul digs even deeper. Do they yearn for God. Is there something inside that cries “Abba Father?”. Do they glow during worship or are they distracted with a blank look on their face? Do they sing about God or do they sing to God? Is worship mere entertainment or an expression of inner unction? Do they commune with God when alone. Do they bubble over with testimony of God encounters throughout the day or week? Is it obvious that they delight in God? I also look to see if they have enthusiasm for Jesus Christ. The word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek word “entheos.. It literally means “God within.” When God is within there will be a radiance shining through, and it will grow brighter and brighter as the believer spends more time with God!

The next two verses make it clear that assurance of salvation is the function of the human spirit and not the soul. “16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” If people have sincere doubts of salvation, take them to the cross and review the gospel with them. Don't waste time trying to convince the religious that they have been born-again. I have seen a number of pastors, elders, and even Bible college and seminary graduates come to the realization that they had never been born-again. Oh the joy when they are finally born of the Spirit! (John 3:1-8) Such was the plight of religious Nicodemus.

Those who truly know God begin to embrace their spiritual inheritance “in Christ.” They go in and take possession of the Promised Land in the Spirit. They count it a joy to suffer with Him for they know they shall also be glorified with Him.

Take sincere inventory of these verses and see where you line up. Do what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5 and “test yourself to see whether or not you are in the faith. Examine yourself! If you come up short, run to Jesus, confess your sin and invite Him into your life. Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit and start reading your Bible. Also, look for a good church with other zealous believers. Trust God to lead you.

### **Effects Of The Fall On Creation: Romans 8:18-25**

“18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.. The fall of man had a disastrous effect on the realm of nature. The very workers that God created to care for and cultivate the realm of living things turned against it with greed, exploitation, and destruction.

But that is only a small part of the story. The ground also started producing thorns and thistles. (Genesis 3:17-18) The fall also most likely ushered in harmful germs, bacteria, and viruses. At some point, the diet switched from plant-based (Genesis 1:29-30) to include animal flesh and all species were turned against each other. What was created as a harmonious environment became vicious and deathly competitive.

I would go so far as to speculate that prior to the fall, there was no death. Everything was peaceful and synchronized. But after the fall, blood began to flow like a river throughout the realm of nature. Even weather patterns turned destructive and natural disasters became commonplace. The created realm came under the curse and moved into turmoil. It is with us to this day.

This seems to be what Paul is describing in Romans 8:18-25. Under the current state of nature, there is suffering and groaning. But notice that Paul points to a spillover effect of human redemption to include the entire created realm. Verses 20-21 point out that creation was subjected to futility, but it will be set free from its slavery to corruption when the sons of God are glorified.

Isaiah 11:6-10 speaks of this time. The picture it paints is unimaginable to our current mindset and experience. Let me quote just a few of the verses. “6) And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. 7) Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8) The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den.” Isaiah 11:6-8

I believe this will be fulfilled when Jesus returns to set up His millennial kingdom on earth. (See Revelation 20:1-6) Creation recognizes the Creator. When He was on earth, Jesus was able to speak peace into the raging sea and violent storms (Mark 4:39-41), and reported that even the rocks would cry out in praise and recognition of Him. (Luke 19:40)

The present sufferings, pain and chaos in Creation is the result of the reign of the god of this world. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) He comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10) He wants to defile, destroy, make desolate, and corrupt everything that God created as a reflection of His glory. Lost and rebellious humanity ignorantly participated in this tragic demise.

However, in Romans 8:18-25, Paul has a message for Satan. The work of Jesus Christ on the Cross has the power to not only redeem lost humanity, it will also return Creation to its intended glory. Creation is eagerly awaiting the return of its Creator. Amazing times are coming!

**Present Sufferings Versus Future Glory: Romans 8:18, 23, & 29**

“18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;”

There is a significant interplay taking place within this context that is often missed with a casual reading. It is the comparison of “this present suffering” with the coming “redemption of the body.. This present age is marked by a fallen world and the accompanying suffering that goes with it. We endure everything from disease and sickness to human wars and natural disasters. The god of this present world is bent on pain, misery, and suffering.

This age started with the fall of Adam and Eve and is still with us to this day. Notice that humanity is staged as a focus of this struggle and all of creation is affected by it. There is something so significant about humanity that the cosmic forces of light and darkness are locked in a fierce battle for every human soul in this present age.

But Paul talked about a major shift in verse 19 when he mentioned “the revealing of the sons of God?” This age is about to give way to something very different. He hinted at it again in verse 21 when he talked about “the freedom of the glory of the children of God?” Notice in verse 23 that it has something to do with our adoption as sons and the redemption of our body. He comes back to it again in verse 29 when he alluded to being “predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son?”

As he wrote these verses, he was weaving numerous thoughts together that put the gospel at the cutting edge of future events. What is about to happen to Christians will change the very fabric of reality itself and deal a fatal blow to the kingdom of darkness.

I believe he was looking forward to events described in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 when Christians put on new and glorified bodies fashioned after the resurrected body of Christ. (See 1 John 3:1-2) These perishable bodies will become imperishable and mortality will be swallowed up by immortality. According to the Apostle, the glories awaiting us are unimaginable. The change will be so dramatic and significant that it will affect the entire created realm according to Romans 8:20-21.

Forgive my rambling, but no human to date has undergone this change. It will happen to all believers from every age at the same time at some point in the future. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 sheds light on this coming mystery. (See also Hebrews 11:39-40) In a moment, at the twinkling of an eye, all believers will suddenly be transformed into new and glorified bodies that will make Hollywood’s superheroes and mutants look dismal. I can only imagine!

In the meanwhile, we are living in the realities of Romans 8:26-39. The Holy Spirit is helping our weakness in this fallen world. Jesus Himself is next to the Father interceding for us. God is actively causing all things to work together for our good. He is preparing us for His future plan. He is for us and not against us, even though we struggle with frailty, sin, and failure. As His

children, we are wrapped in His love so tight that nothing the enemy can throw at us can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See Romans 8:31-39) Paul recognized only too well how difficult the sufferings of this present life in frail human bodies could be, but he took courage in the fact that something much more glorious was coming. As the full context of Romans 8 is unpacked, it pushes speculation to the limits. It is vital that every Christian embrace a view of reality that far surpasses their mundane daily life. God is doing something very big and every Christian is part of it.

#### **The Divine Intercessory Team: Romans 8:26-30**

“26) In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27) and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”

There are many things in this life we will never understand and there are times we will not know what to pray or how to pray. Life can be a mystery. But according to these verses, God has us surrounded with an amazing intercessory prayer team. Let's look at it.

First, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. He has a direct line of access To God. He is ever present with us. Some call this “praying in the Spirit.. I see it as the Spirit Himself praying for us. He is welcome on my prayer team anytime!

Second, Jesus searches the heart and knows the mind of the Spirit and intercedes for us according to the will of God. He cleans up our emotions, wrong motives, and self-will and turns them into prayers that are consistent with God's will.

Finally, we have proof of these truths because God the Father causes all things to work together for good in the lives of those who know God and are called according to His purpose. He is working to conform us into the likeness of Christ. He doesn't want one trial wasted or one blessing missed in our lives. He wants them all to have an impact in our lives.

When these three are put together, we discover that the Trinity is active in our lives and moving us toward the fulfillment of God's will. He wants to conform us to His predestined plan for our lives so that we fulfill every purpose He has for us.

I confess these truths are a mystery to me, but they give me great comfort for I know that God is for me and not against us. His will and purpose will prevail in my life. I strive to yield to His plan and purpose for me and not fight against it. We should want everything God has for us.

#### **The Love Mind Game: Romans 8:31-34**

“31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

One of the mind games Satan plays on people is trying to convince them that God does not love them or that He is against them. This is true of both Christians and non-Christians.

From the time the serpent appeared in the garden to tempt Eve, he aimed his assault at the character and nature of God. In Genesis 3:2 he questioned the word of God and in Genesis 3:5 he questioned the motive of God. His goal was to plant seeds of doubt about God. He has done the same throughout human history. He works overtime to distort people's view of God.

In Romans 8:31-34, Paul was making the case that God is for us and not against us. In demonstration of His love, He went so far as to give His Only Son to redeem us from our sin. He does not stand against us to condemn us. To the contrary, He provided the way to forgive and save us.

I guarantee that you will wrestle with God's love and acceptance of you. Rather than accepting His unconditional love by faith, you will enter a game of trying to earn His love and approval. The problem with this game is that the rules are based on self-effort, and we as people are destined to fail and fall short.

Spend time with the above text and the balance of Romans 8 until the truth sinks in. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ to save you by His work on the cross, nothing can ever separate you from His love. You are wrapped and sealed in His unwavering Agape love.

**God's Unfathomable Love. Romans 8:35-3.**

"35) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36) Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is a common tendency to look at our external circumstances and use them as a basis of evaluating God's love for us. If things are going well and blessings abound, we think, "God must certainly love me." But when trials come our way or we face hardship or adversity, we begin to blame God and question His love for us.

But we forget that we live in a fallen world marred by sin. The God of this world is also a sadistic thief and according to John 10:10, he comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. He is our enemy and can bring persecution, affliction, and hardship our way.

With this in mind, go back and revisit Paul's list of trials and hardship in Romans 8:35-36. As you read, think of the hardship of the persecuted Christians of Paul's day endured with affliction and martyrdom. They had all of this negative stuff in Paul's list leveled against them on a daily basis. But did that mean God did not love them. Let that sink in!

Satan loves to get us in a mind game of looking at our externals and constantly questioning God's love for us. It's not fair. Satan screwed up this world. Our sin from giving into his temptations left deep wounds and scars in our life. Accidents and diseases happen in this fallen world. Our mortal bodies wear out. Relationships are strained by selfish and egocentric motives. People exploit other people in tragic ways. And then when hardship comes our way, Satan laughs and points the blame at God.

If you buy into this mental game of looking at externals, you will never resolve God's unquestionable love for you. Look at verses 38-39; Paul laid out all of the negatives Satan and

this world could hurl against him and concluded that nothing “can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus or Lord.”

But hold on! There is more to the story. The early Christians knew how to thrive inwardly despite externals. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 captures this spiritual secret; 16) Therefore we do not lose heart, but though the outward man is decaying, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” Inner worship and communion with Christ is not based on externals. We can be “in the Spirit” during our darkest hours. In fact, negative externals can literally catapult us deeper into precious communion with Christ when we embrace this spiritual secret.

Let me give a personal testimonial. Not long ago, I passed through the most difficult year of my life. I was dealing with unimaginable knee pain. I lost my mobility and ability to walk. I lived with constant pain 24/7. I also endured double knee replacements and repair in one knee from a very bizarre injury that sliced a tendon and my quadricep muscle length-wise so that part of each was tracking under my kneecap and the rest on top. Every step felt like a knife. I share this not to get sympathy, but to drive home another point.

At the same time all that was going on, I went through the absolute best year of life in my walk with God. I learned so much about worship, walking in the spirit, new depths of prayer, inner communion with Jesus, and joy. Don’t get me wrong, I was pretty vocal about expressing pain and discomfort to those close to me. God does not expect us to deny reality. But inwardly, I’ve had inexpressible glory times with God. I have learned that my spirit can thrive even when my flesh is suffering.

Some of my friends have asked, “Terry, don’t you have the faith to be healed?”. I chuckle inwardly and reply, “God has healed me in ways you could never know.. In fact, had God healed me at the onset of this trial, I would have missed my wilderness journey with God.

I share this story because it captures what Paul was saying to the suffering Christians of his day. Your spirit can thrive in the face of trials that are painful to your flesh. I know that my journey has been small compared to what the early Christians endured. I can say the same for many of my brothers and sisters in the persecuted church today.

Paul’s message in this text is clear: “Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!” The greater the external trials, the deeper can be the glory of your inner communion with God.

### **Trusting God With Your Unsaved Loved Ones. Romans 9:1-5**

“1) I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2) that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4) who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5) whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Paul longed for His fellow countrymen to come to Jesus. He would have given his own life if it would have resulted in their salvation. But Paul had a problem, he went from being a promising young Pharisee to a hated traitor when he came to personal saving faith in Jesus. (Read Philippians 3:4-11. He sincerely loved them and wanted to reach them for Jesus, but they hated both Jesus and the gospel, and everything Paul represented. They wanted him dead. As a result, Paul turned his attention to reaching the Gentiles.

So how does this relate to you and me? We all have people we love and long for them to come to Jesus, but they despise us and want nothing to do with us. They assign wrong motives to us and distort anything we say or try to do to reach them. It seems impossible.

I believe Paul adopted a great approach. He sought Jesus with all his might, walked through the open doors God placed before him, turned his countrymen over to God, and loved everyone God sent his way.

God was faithful. He sent Peter and others to focus on reaching the Jewish people. In the same way, we need to trust God to send others to reach our estranged loved ones. Never doubt what God can do!

My motto has become to do my best and trust God and others to do the rest. None of us can carry the load of our unsaved loved ones alone. We need to turn them over to Jesus and trust His sovereignty to reach them. That is the very theme Paul moves into next.

### **The Danger Of Losing The Next Generation: Romans 9:3-5**

“3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4) who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5) whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Israel had such an amazing calling from God. They were His chosen people. He appeared to them in glory many times in the Old Testament. He made covenants with them, gave them the Law through Moses, and gave them the tabernacle followed by the temple. His glory dwelt among them and He made numerous promises to them of abundant blessings that would come if they obeyed Him and followed His ways. They were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the promise of the coming Messiah was going to be through them as a nation. But they turned their back on God and departed quickly from His ways. Instead of the blessing of Deuteronomy 28:1-14, they brought the curse of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 upon themselves. As a result, God turned away from most of them, even though there was always a remnant who sought God.

Possibly the saddest verses in the Bible are John 1:10-11; “10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.. They held to a form of religion, but they rejected Jesus and God's plan of salvation laid out over and over again in the Old Testament.

Possibly the most glorious verse in the Bible is John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” This is an enigma that is hard to comprehend. Why did the nation of Israel as a whole reject Jesus. Paul yearned for them to turn to Jesus. He spends the next two chapters trying to explain this mystery.

But the same is happening today. The sons and daughters of many Christians are turning away from God. Instead of having a personal and dynamic relationship with God, they are giving mere lip service to the religion of their parents. I need to stress this as clearly as possible: “Religion doesn't save anyone –only a personal relationship with Jesus does..

If you are throwing crumbs of religion at your children, they will be lost. The children of Christians do not get a free ride into heaven. Every generation needs to be reached with the



gospel and embrace Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Make sure you are making a priority of evangelizing your own family with the gospel.

### **When Prophecy Doesn't Add Up: Romans 9:6**

Romans 9:6 "But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Abraham."

Paul was going through a theological crisis. As a former Pharisee, Hebrew scholar, and master of the law, he was well versed in God's plan for Israel. But as a whole, the nation of Israel was off script in his day. They were supposed to welcome and embrace the Messiah who was coming to restore Israel and reign on the throne of David, but instead they rejected Him and even led the charge to have Him crucified. Reality did not line up with Paul's understanding of Old Testament prophecy. Let's explore the problem.

It is much easier to look back from our vantage point today, which is nearly 2,000 years later and grasp the mystery. Paul did not have the luxury of understanding the full duration of the church age or that biblical prophecy would be fulfilled literally for Israel in the end times. He was trying to fit the pieces of prophecy together in the perspective of his day and age.

For him and many in the early church, it looked like the word of God had failed.

(Look at Romans 9:6) Things were in chaos. The nation of Israel had gone rogue toward their Messiah while the Gentiles were turning to the Gospel in droves. It did not fit their understanding of prophecy.

Acts 1:6-7 is a great example of their limited perspective. Right after His resurrection, the disciples began asking Jesus; "Lord, is it at this time you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?. They were trying to force end time prophecy and the earthly reign of the Messiah into their day and a possible Jewish liberation from Rome. When I casually read the Old Testament, I understand their mindset.

Ok, I believe we can learn some important lessons from this disconnect. First, God's prophetic Word is always right when understood from God's timing and perspective. The perspective of the early church was way too limited in the first century. Many pieces of the prophecy puzzle were not fitting together.

Second, all Scripture is for us but not all Scripture is to us. For example. I have gleaned much from the book of Leviticus over the years, but I am not going to set up an altar to burn sacrifices during our church service. Those Scriptures were for a different time and age. The same is true for endtime prophecy and the nation of Israel. They will enthusiastically welcome their Messiah in the future.

Third, there are still many mysteries that will unfold in the end times. I do not have it all figured out. I am slowly learning to not put God in a box of my own understanding as it relates to the end times. The truth is that my mind can logically line Scriptures up several different ways to create possible scenarios of the end times. Some are in tension with others. But God does not call us to figure out the end times, He calls us to fulfill the Great Commission!

That last sentence was the secret of the early church. They were willing to walk by faith and accept biblical mysteries they did not understand while focusing on God's revealed plan for them. We need to do the same. We need to embrace our Great Commission call with the same fervor of the early church while leaving the future to the Sovereign will and plan of God.

### **Wrestling With Divine Sovereignty: Romans 9:10-13**

“10) And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11) for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12) it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger.” 13) Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”.

God is sovereign. What He decides happens. His will rules the universe. The story of Jacob and Esau is a prime example and introduction into this subject. God chose Jacob above Esau before they were born. God determined before birth that the lineage to the Messiah and the eventual nation of Israel was going to be through Jacob. “The older was going to serve the younger.”

As it turned out, the story of Jacob and Esau occupies the second half of the book of Genesis, with Jacob eventually giving birth to twelve sons and ending up down in Egypt to survive a famine. So why did God choose Jacob. The answer according to Paul could be summarized as, “because He wanted to!. God chose Jacob because He wanted to choose Jacob!

This is where people struggle with Divine Sovereignty. People demand an explanation for everything, but because God is God, He does not need to explain Himself. He rules. His will is supreme.

However, let me draw an important distinction between the God of the Bible and the gods of Greek mythology or the pagan nations. The God of the Bible always works within His own defined character and nature. He is good, moral, truthful, faithful, loving, and just. He is not random or sadistic.

He knows the end from the beginning and many scholars believe this influences His Choice. I understand that, but I also believe His Sovereignty determines the end outcome. He is absolutely consistent with Himself.

As the Creator, this consistency in God became the basis for the laws of physics. These laws are not random. One of my favorite and very few quotes from Albert Einstein about God says, “Mysterious He is, cruel He is not.. Einstein saw order and design in the universe. Just because he could not resolve a mystery did not give him freedom to opt for a random explanation outside of the principle of order in the universe.

So the question is not; “Why did God choose Jacob above Esau?. The real question is; “Did God get it right?. I would argue that Sovereignty includes the fact that God is consistent and always gets it right! He operates from knowledge and a perspective not shared by us as people. I absolutely welcome and trust the Sovereignty of God above any human intuition, will, decision, or design. I believe God and not man controls the future. This is my basis for faith and peace in every outcome. I firmly believe that God is in control and I trust Him. I yield to His will and sovereignty even though I do not understand everything that happens.

#### **God-Centered vs. Man-Centered: Romans 9:14-18**

“14) What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15) For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” 18) So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”

Before we launch deeply into this text, it is helpful to go back and read the full context of what God said to Pharaoh through Moses. It is found in Exodus 9:13-17. Let me share the paragraph. "Then the Lord said to Moses, "13) Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 14) For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. 15) For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. 16) But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. 17) Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go..

In the context, Pharaoh still thought he was in control and calling all the shots. He thought he was greater than the God of the Hebrews. He was not about to listen to the demands of Moses representing the supposed God of his slaves. Keep in mind, the Hebrews had been in slavery for over 400 years. Their God had done nothing to help or free them during that long time of Egyptian oppression and sovereignty. Pharaoh had every reason to be proud and arrogant. All of that was about to change. God was informing Pharaoh that he was about to become an object lesson to the whole world of the surpassing glory and power of the God of the Hebrews. Even the gods of the Egyptians were about to be humiliated before the One and True God. God rules supreme. He has every right to have mercy on whom He desires, and to harden whom He desires. All things belong to Him! He was well within His domain to use Pharaoh and Egypt to demonstrate His surpassing glory, power, and sovereignty.

But the modern secular mindset has a problem with Romans 9:14-18. They see it as cruel and unreasonable. But the true problem is much more cynical. Modern humanism sees man and not God as the center of all things. Good and bad is defined by how it benefits and promotes humanity. Even many modern Christians believe that God exists for their sake and not the other way around.

By contrast, the Bible places God at the center of the universe. All things including humanity exist for His sake. He can do as He pleases with His creation. He had every right to raise up a Pharaoh and a nation like Egypt to advance His plan and purpose. But let's slow down a moment and notice an important subscript in the text.

Did you notice Romans 9:15. He said to Moses; "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.. He did not say, "I will be harsh, cruel, or sadistic with whom I please!. Why? God in His Sovereignty is still bound by His loving, merciful, and just character and nature. He does not toy with people or make sport of them for His own sick pleasure as false gods throughout human history have done.

Moses respected the dignity of Pharaoh before his people over and over again as the story unfolded. He gave him multiple opportunities to decide when plagues would end and opportunities to release the Hebrews. God's signs and wonders were abundant and transparent for all to see. But you say, "That doesn't matter, God still destroyed a nation needlessly..

I would suggest you do not have the full biblical story. Though He judged them harshly in the book of Exodus; according to Isaiah 19:18-25, He has a future plan for a spiritual revival in Egypt. He is going to have mercy and compassion on them. Isn't that just like God. He wants to reach people from every nation, tribe and tongue. It is part of His sovereign Plan.

**The Potter and the Clay: Romans 9:19-21**

“19) You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” 20) On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? 21) Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use. In verse 19, Paul raises an objection that is not uncommon among the critics of the doctrines of Divine Sovereignty and Election today. Let me try to paraphrase the question as it applies to Pharaoh in the preceding verses; “If God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, how could He hold Pharaoh accountable for his actions?. If Pharaoh could not resist God’s will, how can God assign fault to Pharaoh?” That is a profound line of reasoning. I have gone down that pathway of thinking many times.

Unfortunately, Paul does not answer his own rhetorical question. Instead he raises the stakes and asks another question; “Who is man to answer back to God and put Him on trial?. God does not need to explain Himself to His creation. (Verse 20)

Simply put, many things in life are the way they are because God made them that way. I don’t know why mammals cannot breath under water or why fish cannot fly? I just accept the fact that the Creator made things that way. Paul infers that being “Creator” has certain privileges that go with the job!

Then in verse 21 Paul uses the illustration of the potter and clay to drive this point home. He asks, “Does the vessel made have the right to question the potter who made it. ”The understandable response of the potter to the vessel is: “You are the way you are because I made you that way!.. Being the potter has certain privileges that go with the job!

But in verse 21, Paul infers another issue. The potter. frequently makes vessels for honorable use and for dishonorable use from the same lump of clay. Why is that? Answer: Because both are needed!

The actual contrast inferred between the two vessels in the text is even more profound. It could translate; “fine dishes for serving meals to special guests and potty pots to carry human waste to the latrine.” Which is more important? Well, that depends on how desperate you are to find a restroom! Both are needed and both have roles to fill.

So why did God create both Moses and Pharaoh. You could say they both came from the same lump of clay, or at least grew up in the same palace together. Answer: “Because the Divine Potter decided to do it that way!.. Some theological and philosophical questions do not have good answers. They are shrouded with mystery within the sovereign will of the Creator.

Remember, there are certain privileges that go with that job!

### **What is God Waiting For: Romans 9:22-24**

“22) What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23) And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24) even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”

We now come back to where the book of Romans started in Romans 1:18-20; “For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness... so that they are without excuse.”

The Bible teaches that throughout history, God has been very patient with the ungodly for several reasons. First, He is patient because he wants to give them an opportunity to repent and

come to salvation. (2 Peter 3:9) The Old Testament book of Jonah and Nineveh is a great example.

Second, He is patient because He uses the ungodly as a teaching tool and example of His righteous judgment on sin. (See Romans 9:22 and 2 Peter 2:4-6) The big three Old Testament examples are 1) the fallen angels of Genesis 6, 2) the pre-flood civilization that perished, and 3) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, He is patient with the wicked because He wants to illustrate the surpassing riches of His glory and goodness He has in store for His own. (See Romans 9:22-24) Maybe King David serves as an Old Testament example of this principle. God blessed him despite his shortcomings because he sincerely sought after God.

With that in mind, we now need to survey the bigger question Paul is asking; "Is it okay for God to use the unrighteousness to display His glory, power, love, and grace for His own people?. Keep in mind, just like with Pharaoh in Egypt, God also levels His judgment against their false gods! He exposes them.

Or as some ask, "Why doesn't God just wipe out the wicked and remove sin from the earth?. What is He waiting for? Well, He has a future plan to do just that, but in the meantime I believe He wants to preserve the dignity of free will. God wants people to love Him because they want to love Him and not because they have no choice. So, we come back to Paul's question, "Is God justified in letting the wicked and the righteous openly interact in the world?"

I say, "Yes!. That's what makes the Bible so profound. It is the story of good and bad, right and wrong, the true God versus many false gods. History is "His story!" The Bible exposes the folly of evil and the glory of good. God is well within His bounds to let history unfold and remove the mask from sin and Satan. The life of every human tells a story much bigger than themselves. Learn to read those stories.

### **God Always Had A Plan For The Whole World: Romans 9:23-26**

"23) And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24) even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. 25) As He says also in Hosea, 'I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.' " 26) "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God.'"

Paul now turns to Old Testament prophecy to prove that God has always had a plan for the Gentiles. He quotes the prophet Hosea as found in Hosea 2:23.

In the context, Hosea had been talking about the restoration of Israel and how God would betroth her to Himself forever. But in the process, He was not going to forget about the Gentiles. This was a preview of Ephesians 2:11-22. (Please Read) In Christ, God had a plan to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to Himself. Though the plan was fully revealed in the New Testament through Christ, it was included in Old Testament prophecy.

Paul argues that this prophetic revelation was significant and should have prepared the nation of Israel for the world-wide scope of the gospel and the redemptive work of Christ for the whole world.

### **The Folly of Works-Based Religion. Romans 9:27-33**

“27) And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; 28) for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” 29) And just as Isaiah foretold, “Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, We would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah.” 30) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31) but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32) Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33) just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed”

Paul now uses Isaiah to explain the rejection of the Messiah by Israel in his day. Put very simply, they chose works-based religion above a faith-based relationship with Jesus Christ. They turned away from the freedom and forgiveness that comes through faith to embrace the bondage and condemnation that comes through the Law.

The Gentiles however, came to faith in Christ in droves. When they heard the gospel they received it eagerly. Works-based religion always gives a false sense of security and it inevitably falls short of the glory of God and holiness. It leads to condemnation and death.

Make sure you are on a faith journey with Jesus Christ rather than being hypnotized by works-based religion. Works-based religion was a dead end road for Israel, and it will be the same for you.

### **When the Bible Challenges Your Theology: Romans 10:1**

“1) Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.”

A number of years ago, I heard a noted pastor make the statement that there is no record of praying for the salvation of the lost in the Bible. His extreme views of predestination canceled out any notion of praying for the lost.

I waited until we were alone after the service and respectfully challenged his statement. I simply asked, “If we are not to pray for the salvation of the lost, how do you explain Paul’s statement in Romans 10:1?” As he turned to the text and read it out loud, a very perplexed look came over his face. He then very humbly replied; “I have never noticed this verse before. I stand corrected.”

God used this verse and 1 Timothy 2:1-10 to deeply impact his thinking. To his credit, the next Sunday he opened his message with an apology and a correction. The Holy Spirit used these verses to breathe new life into his praying and over the next few months he developed a passion for the lost.

There are mysteries in the Word of God that are sometimes hard for us to reconcile with our theology. Charles Spurgeon understood this concept. He was faithful to preach every text of Scripture accurately, even when the text challenged his theological bias.

Beware lest your theology blind you to precious truths in Scripture and thwart your spiritual growth. It is the Bible that defines truth and not theological rationality pushed to conclusions not stated in the Bible itself.

The Bible has what I call paradoxical truth. That might be described as truth framed in opposites. A good example could be the sovereignty of God as contrasted to human responsibility and free will. They seem to contradict, but both are taught in the Bible. It is only

within a human perspective that they are in tension. I cannot solve the mystery, but they are in perfect harmony in the Bible.

Now a word of caution. Beware of embracing one side of a paradoxical truth to the exclusion of the other. When that happens, your theology and not the Bible becomes your guide to truth and you drift into error. Pray for the grace and faith to filter your theology through the Bible rather than empowering your human reason to filter the Bible through your theology.

To the credit of the pastor mentioned above, he was willing to embrace a biblical statement that he was previously blinded to because of years of theological bias. Soon God removed blinders in other areas as well. It started him on a journey of living by faith and discovering the ministry of the Holy Spirit in fresh ways.

### **The Most Common Chorus in Hell: Romans 10:1-4**

“1) Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2) For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3) For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

The philosophy may sound noble in society today, but it is going to be the most common chorus in hell; “I did it my way!. It doesn’t work when it comes to salvation.

That’s exactly what Paul said about Israel. They had a zeal for God and spiritual things, but they refused to do it God’s way. As a result, they set out to establish their own righteousness and even create their own religion. Instead of obeying the Word of God, they listened to the traditions of their elders. (See Matthew 15:1-9)

Jesus made it clear that He was the way, the truth, and the life. He was the only way to the Father. (See John 14:6) The “Jesus only” message is what Peter preached to Israel on every occasion. Read the full context of Acts 4:8-12. Listen to his powerful conclusion in verse 12; “For there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”

Listen to Paul’s punch line in today’s text; “4) For Christ is the end of the Law of righteousness to everyone who believes.” Don’t add to Him and don’t take away from Him. Focus on Jesus Christ and the gospel.

Let me make an observation that may shock you: There is no serious push today to get rid of religion. There are new religions invented nearly every day. The push is to get rid of biblical Christianity, Jesus Christ, and the gospel. The push is to “let every person do it my way!” That is the impetus behind every man-made religion.

Don’t be ignorant about the Bible, Jesus Christ, or the gospel. Set your pride and arrogance aside and do it God’s way. Don’t join the chorus in hell.

### **The Trap of Legalism: Romans 10:5**

“For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.”

We are going to take a very small bite this time and discuss one concept. Paul was again comparing justification by the works of the Law to faith in Jesus Christ as a basis of salvation. In the process he introduces a concept missed by many.

When it comes to the Law, you cannot pick and choose which part you will keep and which part you will discard. That's what he quoted Moses as saying in the above verse. The Law is an everything-or-nothing proposition.

He was even more blunt on this subject in Galatians 3:10-14. Let me quote: "10) For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.' 11) Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' 12) However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.' 13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'— 14) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

It seems that many in Paul's day were seeking to blend the Law and grace and come up with a hybrid religion. They ended up with Grace strangled by legalism. There was no joy, assurance, or freedom. They were constantly trying to gain God's approval and falling short. And just when they thought they arrived, someone else would come along with another list.

This is essentially what Paul was saying in Romans 10:2-4. They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They were constantly adding conditions to the gospel.

I went down that road early in my Christian life. I was becoming very legalistic and a spiritual grump to be around. My change took place when I memorized the book of Galatians. The Spirit of God used the Word of God to turn a light on in my soul. It was a battle, but I came out the other side a free man in Jesus Christ with a fresh understanding of what it meant to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. Every Christian needs to camp out in the book of Galatians for an extended period of time.

It seems that Satan tries to embroil every believer in this confusion. If he cannot prevent someone from becoming a Christian, he will entangle and overwhelm them in religious confusion and legalism.

The solution seems to be an unbiased and persistent study of Scripture. Jesus promised in John 8:31-32 that abiding in His Word would bring truth and freedom. Listen to what others are saying, but do your own Word time while seeking the Holy Spirit to guide you.

One aspect of freedom in my life means I am no longer carrying other people's spiritual junk and dysfunction. I am free to love, worship, walk in the Spirit, and commune with Jesus Christ with a clear conscience and joy unspeakable.

I pay attention to the Word, but I have a big dumpster for the dysfunctional opinions of others. I work at not letting others spray cold water on the fire in my spirit. There are hundreds of spiritual fire hydrants out there and many people eagerly dump their cold water spiritual junk on you.

But our calling is to please and glorify Jesus Christ and not other people. Constantly monitor if you are moving toward freedom or bondage. Is your intimacy with Jesus Christ being deepened or dampened. Is your walk in the Spirit getting hotter or colder? Are you doing it God's way, your own way, or someone else's way?

#### **Law vs Faith Approach To God: Romans 10:5-8**

"5) For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. 6) But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7) or 'Who will



descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." 8) But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,"

Paul now contrasts two radically different ways key figures in the Old Testament approached God. The first was the works approach based on the Law. It can be pictured by Exodus 19 and the giving of the Law. When God came down on the mountain, He sent Moses to warn the people to consecrate themselves, but keep a distance under penalty of death. Legalism always separates from God, creates barriers, and brings condemnation. Unlike Moses, they did not yet know God.

But then in Romans 10:6-8, Paul points to a faith-based approach to God practiced by some Old Testament people. Ironically, he even quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to establish this approach. As he explains it, he zeros in on faith as the key to this relationship with God. In this approach, people simply establish an intimate relationship with God in their heart. They accept Him by child-like faith.

I would argue that David had this kind of relationship with God and it started when he was a young shepherd. Many Psalms present his faith walk with God, but Psalm 23 absolutely nails it; "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..." and it goes on to lay out his profound faith relationship with God. David loved God's Word and the Law. It helped him understand the holiness of God but never dampened his relationship with God. He had a deep inner faith relationship with God that was rooted in his heart.

In the next few verses, Paul uses a heart connection with God as the basis of salvation. (See Romans 10:8-14) He defines it as saving faith or belief. Note that it is rooted in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. (Vs 9) It is far from a works-based religious system. The two are polar opposites.

If you choose to build a legalistic walk with God, you will forever be like the children of Israel sitting at a distance as Moses went up to the mountain to meet with God. When he delayed, they quickly got distracted and turned to other gods. Such is the story of many in our churches today. Religion not anchored in a personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ will never lead to salvation or intimacy with God. It is religious but empty.

#### **The Biblical Basis Of Salvation: Romans 10:8-11**

"8) But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10) for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11) For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.""

The Great Commission is very simple. We are called to preach the gospel to everyone and let the Holy Spirit save those who believe. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (John 1:27)

Some people get hung up on trying to figure out who are the elect, but the Bible doesn't focus on the elect, it focuses on believers. The way the Bible reads, those who die as believers are the elect. It doesn't matter how many times they hear the gospel before they believe, those who put faith in Jesus Christ and believe in Him are the children of God!

The above text in the book of Romans ends the discussion. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be

saved!. (Romans 10:9) Salvation is based solely and only on faith in Jesus Christ. Stop adding conditions to the gospel!

It doesn't matter if you read John 1:12, John 3:16, Acts 16:30-31, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 10:8-11, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, Ephesians 1:13-14... and the list goes on and on and on; those who hear the gospel and believe are born again. They are the children of God. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit. Faith or belief in Jesus Christ is the only basis for salvation set forth in the Bible. I can find none other.

Stop adding other conditions to salvation. It has nothing to do with church membership, infant baptism, confirmation, communion, good works, right doctrine, or theology, keeping the Ten Commandments, the version of the Bible you read, how you dress or wear your hair or which Bible scholars you read. Salvation is based solely on personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Once someone becomes a Christian then the process of discipleship and spiritual growth begins. Salvation is an event, sanctification and spiritual growth are life-long processes.

It has been said that two surprises await those who get to heaven. The first surprise will be some of the unexpected people who are there. The second surprise will be some of the expected people who are not there!

#### **The Gospel and the Early Church: Romans 10:14-15**

"14) How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15) An. How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

Paul and the early church took their human responsibility to spread the gospel seriously. If you study Paul's letters, "the gospel" is a theme in every epistle. In Philippians Chapter One he uses the word "gospel" six times and concludes that he was set aside for the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Spreading the gospel was the consuming passion of his life.

In the above context, Paul raises the question of how people are going to believe in the gospel if they have never heard it preached? His discussion pointed to the urgent mandate of the church to raise up and send out witnesses, missionaries, and preachers. Paul and the early church were committed to the Great Commission. (See Matthew 28:18-20) They understood that every Christian was gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in witnessing and evangelism. (See Acts 1:8)

The passive attitude of the modern church toward the intentional and persistent spread of the gospel at home and abroad is the number one disconnect with the early church. In two generations, they reached and changed the Roman Empire. In the past two generations secular Rome has infiltrated and pushed the modern church to total social irrelevance. Why?

I would suggest the modern church has lost its biblical mandate, mission, and call to spread the gospel. Satan has us spinning our wheels on mundane and irrelevant things.

The average evangelical church in America today reports less than one conversion a year.

Those numbers are radically different from the conversion rate seen by the early church in the book of Acts. The truth hurts, but the modern church has for the most part abandoned the gospel.

But those churches today which are making disciples and spreading the gospel are bursting at the seams. They are growing. The Holy Spirit is working and people are being converted.

If your church is stuck in a rut, you have embraced either doctrinal or practical dysfunction. You have abandoned the gospel. You are part of the problem.

Every time revival or awakening comes, spreading the gospel becomes a top priority among God's people. Sometimes, a fresh focus on praying and sharing the gospel sparks revival in otherwise dead churches as new people start coming to Jesus and bring fresh zeal into the church.

If you yearn to see the Holy Spirit work in fresh and powerful ways, move to the front lines of spreading the gospel. That is where He is always active. If you doubt me, just take time and review the four gospels and the book of Acts. The heart of Jesus pulsates with passion for the lost and the spread of the Gospel.

### **Beautiful Feet: Romans 10:15**

“15) How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!””

There are few things more glorious than carrying the gospel to the lost. This is especially true in remote or tribal areas where they have never previously heard the gospel.

I have been privileged several times to be part of God's team to help carry the gospel to these places. It is not uncommon for village leaders to assemble the whole village to hear the message. The Holy Spirit often works in powerful ways in these settings. We have seen entire villages decide to follow Jesus and invite missionaries to bring Bibles and weekly studies. Other times we have had villages strongly oppose the gospel. On one trip years ago up the headwaters of the Amazon jungle, we had the Holy Spirit prepare the way by speaking to village leaders with dreams the night before we arrived. There was a major outpouring of belief in Jesus and the gospel in that village. Our feet were beautiful to them.

In the very next village just the opposite happened. After a brief meeting with the city leaders they opted for fire water, evil spirits, and immorality rather than Jesus. They told us to leave and warned us not to return to their village. It remained closed to the gospel for a long time.

It doesn't matter if it is in Mongolia, India, Haiti, Africa, or South America –the Holy Spirit creates a bond between the messengers and new believers. Where God is working, glorious blessings unfold. The great work is often multi-generational and takes years of mentoring and discipleship. It requires long-term workers.

Jesus expressed His heart to His disciples in John 4:34-38. They had just returned from a city in Samaria to buy food. They had not made any meaningful connections for the kingdom with anyone. In the meanwhile, Jesus stayed behind and ministered to a Samaritan woman. She went back to the same village and told everyone about Jesus. Soon she was bringing a large crowd in tow toward Jesus.

Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples. “34) Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. 35) Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. 36) Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37) For in this case the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38) I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.” 39) From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all

the things that I have done.”” John 4:34-39 I have no clue what she looked like, but I would include her on the list of those with beautiful feet because her footprints led people to Jesus. So what was it like to hang out with Jesus on a typical day? Matthew 9:35-36 tells us. He ministered to people and shared the gospel. It is followed by this command to His disciples; “36) Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37) Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38) Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His Harvest.” Matthew 9:36-38

Jesus wants His followers to work in the harvest fields. He wants them to minister to the needs of people and share the gospel. He wants them to let their light shine. As Paul said in Ephesians 6:15, He wants His people to shod their feet with the gospel of peace. He wants every Christian to have beautiful feet adorned with the gospel.

### **Surprising Results: Romans 10:16-18**

“16) However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17) So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. 18) But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.””

After talking about the importance of messengers to proclaim the gospel, Paul now makes it clear that not everyone is going to believe or receive the good news. In fact, when all the Scriptures are studied side by side, it looks like the majority turn away from the gospel. (See Matthew 7:13-14 and Mark 4:13-20 as examples)

I personally believe the faithful proclamation of the gospel serves two purposes. First, it is the basis of salvation to those who believe. Second, it is the basis of judgment for those who do not believe.

Jesus made this clear in John 3:16-21. The full context deserves your careful study. Verse 18 provides a valuable overview; “18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.. He went on to say that some people love the darkness and hate the light. The preaching of the gospel becomes the dividing point between the children of light and the children of darkness. It separates the righteous from the wicked, the saved from the unsaved and the sons of God from the sons of the devil.

You never know who the chosen are until the gospel is clearly preached. Sometimes the religious become cold and calloused while otherwise very sinful people trust in Jesus and are saved. If salvation is based on works, the religious crowd looks like the chosen. But because it is based on faith in the good news of Jesus Christ, the results can be shocking.

In fact, this is going to become the theme of the next chapter in the book of Romans.

Surprisingly, for the most part the Jewish people rejected the gospel while many Gentiles received Him. Do not be selective in your preaching of the gospel. Let it go out into all the world. It is our job to proclaim the gospel, it is the Holy Spirit's job to save people.

### **Prophetic Overview of Romans Eleven: Romans 11:1-2, 11-12**

“1) I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2) God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?... 11) I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did

they? May it never be! 12) But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!"

As we come to Romans chapter eleven, Paul steps into the office of a prophet. Let me give a brief introduction to this chapter.

Two thousand years ago, Paul witnessed the rejection of the nation of Israel of their Messiah, which opened the door to the Gentiles. But he was quick to point out that at some point Israel was going to have a change of heart and welcome their Messiah. The natural olive branch was going to be grafted back in.

We are now approaching those days. Keep your eyes on the nation of Israel. Many Jewish people around the world are turning to the Messiah. The nation of Israel is being isolated and opposed by the nations. The stage is being set for the return of the Messiah.

Read Romans eleven as a whole and pay attention to this trend. This shift is now taking place. We are living in unprecedented times.

The scholars of Israel always believed their day of rest would be after the sixth millennium of recorded history and not at the end of the fourth millennium. That's one reason why they rejected Jesus during His first coming.

We are now at the end of the sixth millennium. Just as there were six days of creation followed by the day of rest, so Israel is anticipating their Messiah any time. They believe their day of rest is coming. The natural olive branch is being grafted back into the tree.

#### **God Has A Faithful Remnant in Israel. Romans 11:1-6**

"1) I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2) God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3) "Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." 4) But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5) In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6) But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

Even though the majority in Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah and the religious leaders were foremost in putting Him to death, Paul is arguing that God has always had a faithful remnant in Israel. He used Elijah as an example. When he was running for his life from Ahab and complaining to God that he was all alone, God assured him that he still had 7,000 who had not bowed down to Baal.

In the same way, Paul recognized that there was a faithful remnant in his day. His underlying theme was that God kept His promise to Israel.

There are many today that argue that the church is now spiritual Israel. God is no longer bound to His Old Testament promises made to the nation of Israel. But Paul is arguing that God has always kept His promise to the nation of Israel, and will do so in the end times. The natural olive branch will come back.

I encourage you not to overly spiritualize the Old Testament and do not doubt God's promises to the nation of Israel. They will return to the Messiah and He will keep every aspect of His Promise to Israel.

### **Looking At Romans 11 Through The Lens Of History and Prophecy: Romans 11:7-11**

“7) What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8) just as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day.” 9) And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. 10) Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever.” 11) I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.”

Reading the story of Israel in the Old Testament defies explanation. No more had Joshua and the elders that served under him passed away and Israel abandoned God. (See Judges 2:10-11. It was not a slow decline or mere drifting into moral decline, it was an abandonment of God while embracing pagan gods.

Even after the reign of David and the revival of his day, the same drift started again. Eventually the temple that Solomon built was forsaken and even filled with idols and the practice of spiritism and the occult. They again turned to embrace other gods as told in the books of 1 & 2 Kings. God did not abandon His people, they abandoned Him. But He always had a faithful remnant through every generation.

After the rebuilding of the temple under Nehemiah and Ezra, another problem developed. The revival and zeal for God they led was quickly replaced by legalism and empty creeds and rituals. Judaism became cold, calloused, and indifferent. A zeal for God was replaced by rules, regulations, and a religious political system of institutional repression and control. They again abandoned God.

That was the spiritual and moral climate that John the Baptist and Jesus Himself were born into and came to change, but for the most part, it rejected both of them. But the Gospel was being widely proclaimed and the Holy Spirit was about to be given.

In Romans Chapter 11, Paul is tackling the phenomenon of the Gentiles turning to Jesus in mass during his day while for the most part institutional Judaism back in Israel remained indifferent. Nevertheless, the Jewish church in Jerusalem was growing, but it was under immense persecution from the Sanhedrin and Jewish religious leaders that crucified Jesus.

The irony is that prior to his conversion, Paul was previously the leader of this persecution. His life story is a testimony of how much God yearns for the Jewish people and how He can reach them despite their blind, cold, rebellious, and indifferent hearts. It can happen very quickly.

I have no idea of the timing Paul had in mind for the return of Israel to God as he penned Romans 11 through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but I doubt it encompassed the past 2,000 years of church history. I would argue that we are still living in Romans 11, and the full mystery of the return of Israel to the Messiah is about to be fulfilled as the end time approaches.

We are about to witness the wild olive branches being cut off and the natural olive branch being grafted back into the tree. Look around, many former Gentile Christian nations are quickly abandoning God and becoming hostile to Israel. The United States and Western Europe are foremost in this trend. The new remnant might become Gentile Christians as Romans 11 unfolds before our very eyes. Stay true to God in the days ahead.

I know this is not a standard interpretation of Romans 11 and that I am painting with a very broad brush, but it matches church history and the past 2,000 years. It also helps us understand

current events. These are indeed exciting days with many prophecies unfolding before our very eyes in the Middle East and around the world.

### **Israel Is A Prophetic Trigger: Romans 11:11-16**

“11) I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12) Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13) But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14) if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15) For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16) And if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.”

Paul eagerly wanted the Jewish nation to turn to Jesus and accept Him as Messiah, but he understood that Israel was a trigger. Many individual Jewish people were hearing the gospel and being saved in his day, but the nation as a whole remained in a state of rejection.

Look very closely at verse 15), “For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.” When the nation of Israel moves from rejection to acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, it will trigger the big event on God’s calendar. A new age will begin.

So what do I mean by a “new age.. Let me briefly explain. Just prior to His ascension as recorded in Acts 1:6-8, the disciples asked Jesus an important question; “6) ... Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the Kingdom to Israel?. They understood according to numerous Old Testament prophecies that a very unique time of restoration was promised for Israel.

Isaiah 11:1-16 is a prime example of this promised age of restoration. It will be marked by many unique characteristics including a significant expansion of human life span and harmony within all of Creation. (Review Romans 8:18-25)

Notice how Jesus responded to this question from His disciples; “7) It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8) but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth..

That response is profound! Jesus was talking about epochs of time. He was talking about unique ages. He did not deny that an age of restoration was coming for Israel, but He pointed to another age that must come first. It could be called “The Age of the Indwelling Holy Spirit”, or “The Church Age,” or even “The Age of the Gentiles.. The gospel was about to go to the remotest parts of the earth.

Back to our text. In Romans 11:11-32, Paul was juggling with this mystery. In fact, in Romans 11:25 he even called it a “mystery.”

So what was this mystery? Why did Israel reject Jesus as their Messiah? Does God have a plan to get things back on track for Israel? Will God keep His promise to Israel for a time of restoration as questioned by the disciples?

Let me point out that Revelation chapter twenty talks about a millennium reign of Christ on earth. During that time, the Messiah will reign on earth for 1,000 years and fulfill every Old Testament prophecy or promise of the restoration for Israel.

The disciples were asking Jesus the right question about prophecy and a restoration for Israel, they were merely off by 2,000 years. But God is always on time.

As mentioned in a previous post, one thing that led to the nation of Israel rejecting Jesus as Messiah was the timing. They understood He was coming at the end of the six millennium of biblical history and not the end of the fourth millennium as was the case with His nativity and virgin birth as recorded in the four Gospels. It confused the Jewish scholars.

So where are we at on the current timeline of biblical history. We are right at the sunset of the sixth millennium. We are back on the Jewish prophetic calendar for the promised Messiah. Or as Paul was arguing in Romans 11:11-16, we are at the dawn of Israel moving from rejection to acceptance of the Messiah. A huge trigger is about to be pulled by the Nation of Israel related to the Messiah.

Let me make a brief observation. We hear a lot of talk about "The End Times!.. Technically that is not an accurate phrase. Biblically it should be modified to "The End of This Age" or "The End of This Epoch." When it happens, it will be more of a transition to something radically new and different than the mistaken notion of "the end of all things..

This also means that God is not done with planet earth yet. Jesus is going to rule and reign here for 1,000 years according to Revelation 20 before the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 unfolds. That will be the time of restoration for Israel and every Old Testament prophecy will be fulfilled.

I fully believe everything about the tribulation that will accompany this transition to the earthly reign of the Messiah. In fact, I believe we are in the birth pangs Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:8. The contractions have started. Keep your eyes on Israel and the Middle East. Very unique days are upon us.

(Technically, Israel is considered an unreached nation as less than 2% of the population is Christian. Most of the Christians in Israel are of Arab descent, but what most people don't know is that 65% of Israeli Jews consider themselves "secular" or "not religious." As of 2022, only 22% consider themselves "orthodox" or "ultra-orthodox." So, while this nation was founded with the intent of re-populating Israel with Jewish people, the majority do not practice Judaism as we might think of it. What that means is that if you were to take a ride on the train in Israel or start a conversation on the street in Jerusalem, there is a good chance that they would not be practicing traditional Judaism. Their history does make them more resistant to the gospel than some other people groups because Christians have persecuted Jews for well over a thousand years. Germany was a Christian nation at the time of the Holocaust and there is a deep distrust that goes back many, many generations. That attitude is slowly changing, and I could clearly see Biblical prophecy unfolding in Israel today on my three trips there. I share and confirm Terry's observation that the birth pangs have started and we should watch and pray diligently for Israel.) -dj

#### **The Kindness of God: Romans 11:17-24**

"17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18) do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19) You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20) Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21) for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22) Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be



cut off. 23) And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24) For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?"

Never take the gospel for granted. We are in the age of the Gentiles and the gospel is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. The wild olive branches are being grafted into the cultivated tree while Israel remains in a state of rebellion and rejection.

But everything will change quickly. The way I read this text, the natural branch is about to have a change of heart and turn from their unbelief.

God is a debtor to no man. People stand before Him by His kindness and grace. We were grafted into His rich root system by His amazing grace, and not by our own doing or merit. So how do we personalize this text?

Never take your place in the family of God for granted. The greatest mystery in the Bible is why God picked us to be recipients of His grace. We did not earn it. We do not deserve it. Most likely we are the least likely to be desired or wanted. (1 Corinthians 1:26-31) I shall never stop praising and thanking Him for the inexpressible gift of salvation. I stand in awe of His amazing grace.

#### **The Problem and The Fix: Romans 11:33-36**

"33) Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34) For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35) Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36. For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

This is an apt ending to Romans chapter 11 and the mystery of the partial hardening of Israel and the gospel therefore going to the ends of the earth. Yet God has by no means given up on Israel or forgotten His promises.

We get in trouble when we try figuring out God and His ways. His mysteries do not fit our limited context. He cannot be forced into the box of human understanding or perspective. Eternity cannot be interpreted by time any more than the Divine can be fully understood by mere mortals.

Paul nailed it in Romans 11:33-34 when he cried out; "Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgements and unfathomable His ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has become His counselor?."

I always chuckle when people make value judgements about God or put Him on trial. It is as ridiculous as an archeologist digging up a few bones and simple tools and then writing a book with all the details of that ancient culture. They don't have a clue or context, but they have a big imagination.

People do the same with God. He is beyond human experience and knowledge, but we try to force Him into our little boxes. Many scholars and theologians do the same. Every bias squeezes their understanding of God even smaller.

His Word is very broad, but we often force meaning on it not found in the text. As verse 36 says; "He is not our debtor, He owes us nothing.. We need to step back and let Him be in charge and simply trust Him. But living by faith is very counter self-ego and self-controlling. We want God to bow before our throne and our limited understanding. It doesn't work!

Paul summarized the sovereignty of God very well in verse 36: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.. God and not man is the center of all things. He is the cause, the reason, the way, the truth and the ultimate conclusion! Truth and reality become distorted whenever we become the focal point. But it is so natural to make it about us –and the deception and conflict starts right there with our first selfish thought.

### **The Calling: Romans 12:1**

“1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

This verse represents Paul's conclusion to Romans 11:33-36. Because of the unfathomable sovereignty and majesty of God, we should run to Him and not from Him. We should view our bodies and our entire being as a perpetual living and holy sacrifice to Him.

The sacrificial lamb had to be without blemish. It had to be the best of the flock and not average, sickly, or filled with infirmity. Paul was not calling us to outward religious ceremonies. He was simply saying we should view ourselves as set aside for God. We should live in relationship to Him.

He ends this verse by noting that this sincere consecration to God represents our spiritual service of worship. He wants us, and not an empty religious ceremony. He wants us to be a song of worship to Him.

The principle laid out in this verse is a radical departure from the outward religious facade of Judaism. Jesus did not come to start a new religion, He came to call people into intimate and transforming fellowship with God.

Here is the take away: He is calling you and me to Himself. He wants us to set aside all of our baggage and distractions and answer this call to fellowship. He wants us to move beyond superficial religion and enter into a supernatural relationship with Himself.

Have you answered this call? Is your walk with God real or superficial? Is your life becoming a melody of worship to God?

### **Two Basic Battles For Every Christian: Romans 12:1-2**

“1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

There are two basic battles in these verses that every Christian must fight and win. From verse one we have the battle for the body. This relates to morals and sexual purity. Your body matters to God.

Paul dealt in-depth with the Corinthian believers on this issue. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. He reminded them that their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and belonged to God and that they were not free to indulge in sexual immorality. You cannot walk in fellowship with God while crawling in bed with the world's sexual values.

God wants to break every sexual bondage in your life and set you free to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24) That means that God and the Bible and not the world or your lusts have to become the new definition of your morality. Period! There is no fudging on this point. Don't let Satan try to fool you into trying to worship a holy God while embracing hellish moral values. Jesus made this message abundantly clear to the Samaritan woman.

From verse two we have the battle for the mind. This relates to basic life philosophy and worldview. Your mind matters to God. You can either be conformed to this world or you can be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Ephesians 4:22-24 emphasizes this same vital process. Inviting the Holy Spirit to renew your mind is the prerequisite for putting off the old self and putting on the new self.

You will never be able to discover, discern, or do the will of God with a worldly mindset or secular moral value system. You will condemn yourself to a life of giving empty lip service to God while living in bondage and constantly wrestling with God. This is the recipe for failure and defeat in the cocoon of an empty religious facade.

There is no shortcut. You must invite God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to help you fight and win these two battles. Victory will involve total surrender to God in these two vital areas of life. Every man and woman of God will face these two battles. The process of sanctification is fought on these two battlefields.

### **Embracing Your Need For Others: Romans 12:3-5**

"3) For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4) For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

It has been said that "no man is an island unto himself.. This is especially true within the body of Christ. God has allotted to each a measure of faith so that we are not complete without the rest of the body of Christ. We need one another.

The problem comes when we become deceived into thinking that we can do it alone. In verse three Paul says; "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment..." Self reliance gives birth to numerous problems, pride being at the center.

We all need stones we cannot lift alone, burdens we cannot carry alone, problems we cannot solve alone, and callings we cannot achieve alone. God wants us to come to the end of ourselves to the point of seeing the need and value of others. God in His love will send storms our way with sufficient force to expose our arrogance, pride, and self-centeredness.

This might be why Paul had a thorn in his flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Many believe it was eye or seeing problems. (Galatians 4:12-15) Though God used him to write much of the New Testament, he was dependent on others to do the actual writing and assist him with many daily necessities. This really becomes clear in the little book of Philemon. It seems that Onesimus had become a significant helper for Paul.

The world today pushes a spirit of self-reliance and independence. I have never seen more isolated and lonely people than today. The body of Christ is built on just the opposite. God wants us to be interdependent and thrive on teamwork.

Don't believe Satan's lie that you don't need other people or the body of Christ. As the old song says, "One is the loneliest number of all.. " You are not better than others, you are better with others!"

### **Introduction to Motivational Gifts. Romans 12:6-8**

"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he

who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness..

A number of years ago, I developed and taught a unique leadership course aimed at equipping and training church leaders. One section of the material dealt with Spiritual Gifts. I am going to borrow from that material for this section of the book of Romans.

In this text of Scripture, Paul begins a rather quick transition into a discussion on Spiritual Gifts. These gifts are called “grace gifts” or “charisma gifts.. When doing a study of spiritual gifts, the Bible student quickly discovers there are three separate lists of gifts given in the New Testament. I believe that each list represents a different category of Spiritual gifts. Let me quickly explain.

I look at this list of seven gifts given in Romans 12:6-8 as being “Motivational Gifts.. They seem to represent the personality traits of different people. I find them much more helpful in understanding people than the various secular lists of personality traits. These gifts may be basic personality traits created by God in people at physical birth. Both Christians and non-Christians seem to display these various personality traits. I have found them to be very helpful in understanding people and why they do the things they do. We will develop this list in depth over the next week.

The second list of Spiritual Gifts is found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. I look at this list as being “Manifestation Gifts.” They are gifts given by the Holy Spirit to Christians to equip them for ministry and service. I recently discussed these gifts in depth when we walked through the book of 1 Corinthians. I simply refer you back to that study in the book of 1 Corinthians for a full discussion of the manifestation Gifts.

The final list of Spiritual Gifts is found in Ephesians 4:11. I look at this list as being “Ministry or Administration Gifts.. They represent the various offices of ministry over the church. Once again, I refer you back to our study of the book of Ephesians for an in-depth study of these gifts.

Get ready for a very exciting study. The motivational Gifts as presented by Paul in Romans 12:6-21 helped me understand not only myself, but also other people in the body of Christ. It helped me understand more than just my personal strengths and weaknesses, it also helped me understand other people and why there can be personal conflict and misunderstanding between us.

I dare say that this study saved me from drowning in ministry. It turned potential personal conflict and hardship with others into joy and fruitfulness as we were able to labor side-by-side while leaning on each other’s strengths.

I now accept others and work with them from an understanding of their unique wiring from God. I have discovered over the years that those who are wired by God very opposite from me are the ones I actually need the most. I trust this will be a valuable and rewarding study for you as well and help you understand both yourself and others better.

### **The Motivations of the Prophecy Gift: Romans 12:6c**

“6) Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:6-8 As we look at each motivational gift, I am going to provide a simple outline for each gift. Hopefully this will copy well to each format. Sometimes the outline numbers do not transfer.

For each gift, I will provide a biblical example of someone who had that gift, give a guiding principle from the Romans 12 context that is especially crucial to the person with that character motivation, look at some characteristics of the gift and then look at some potential weaknesses inherent in the person with that gift.

#### 1. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF PROPHECY. Romans 12:6

A. Example. Peter

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:9

C. Characteristics of this Gift:

- . 1) Need to express themselves especially in matters where right and wrong are involved. (Acts 2:14; 3:12; 4:8)
- . 2) Tend to make quick judgments on what they see and hear, and often speak before others. (Matt 14:28; 16:16; 16:22; 17:14)
- . 3) Very discerning of anything deceptive or dishonest and often react harshly. (Acts 5:3-10)
- . 4) Strong desire for justice but very harsh on those who sin or fall short. (Matthew 18:21-22)
- . 5) Usually open about personal faults and failures. (Luke 5:8)
- . 6) Loyalty to truth over relationships. (John 6:67-69)
- . 7) Willing to suffer for the truth and doing right. (Acts 5:29-42)

D. Weaknesses inherent in this gift:

- . 1) Tendency to expose a sinful person without taking care to restore them to fellowship. (Gal. 6:1, Matt 18:21-22)
- . 2) Draw conclusions without all the facts.
- . 3) Rebuke people without love and demand immediate repentance without much grace.
- . 4) Can be extremely self critical and self-condemning. (Mark 16:7)
- . 5) Can be impulsive and make quick decisions. (John 13:6-10)
- . 6) Lack tactfulness and while being painfully direct with people. (Matthew 16:21-22)
- . 7) See everything as right or wrong while dwelling on the negative in people and not letting go of their past.

#### **Motivations of the Gift of Helps: Romans 12:7a**

“6) Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;”. Romans 12:6-7

We now come to the second motivational gift or grace. Paul calls it the gift of service. It is often referred to as the gift of helps. These are those faithful volunteers who faithfully serve in the background doing whatever is needed. They often see the needs before others and put their hands to the task.

I personally believe that Timothy had this motivational gift. We will discover in the scriptures below that he served Paul’s needs as a faithful son in the gospel. Let’s look at the strengths and weaknesses of these people.

#### 2. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF SERVING: Romans 12:7a

A. Example: Timothy

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:10

C. Characteristics of this gift:

- . 1) Quickly sees and meets the needs of others. (Phil 2:20)
- . 2) Receives joy from freeing others to minister. (Phil 2:22)
- . 3) Disregards self in completing tasks for others. (Phil 2:30)
- . 4) Over-committed because they can't say "no".
- . 5) Alert to people's likes and dislikes in buying gifts.
- . 6) Needs approval and affirmation.
- . 7) Enjoys short-range projects.

D. Weaknesses inherent in this gift.

- . 1) Sometimes the task becomes more important than people.
- . 2) Neglect home-front to serve others.
- . 3) Sacrifice personal health for service.
- . 4) Neglect God-given priorities to volunteer.
- . 5) React to others who can't see obvious needs to tackle.
- . 6) Resent lack of appreciation from others.
- . 7) Frustrated with time limits.

Behind every effective pastor or leader are many people with the gift of helps. Truth be told, they carry the load of the ministry. Many of them seldom get the recognition they deserve in this life, but I have a suspicion they will be well known in heaven.

**Motivations Of The Teacher: Romans 12:7c and 11**

"6) Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;" Romans 12:6-7

We now come to the third motivational grace or gift which is the teacher. Luke is a great example of this gift. In both Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-4 we discover that he did his research, was very detailed and confirmed every fact.

The teacher is concerned about the truth. They are studious and will hold the speaker accountable for content. They may or may not be gifted at public speaking, but they will wrestle with the content. Let's look at this important gift.

**3. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF TEACHING: Romans 12:7b**

A. Example: Luke

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:11

C. Characteristics of this gift.

- . 1) Need validation of information. (Luke 1:4)
- . 2) Checks out the background and credentials of teachers. (Luke 1:3)
- . 3) Rely on established resources and teachers. (Acts 17:11)
- . 4) Content presented in systematic and logical fashion. (Luke 1:3)
- . 5) Take time to gather facts and research everything. (Acts 1:1)
- . 6) Requires thoroughness in presenting details.
- . 7) Tries to clarify misunderstandings.

D. Weaknesses inherent in this gift.

- . 1) Potential to become proud of knowledge. (I Cor. 8:1)
- . 2) Despise people with less formal credentials.

- . 3) Depending on human reasoning. (I Cor. 1:20-31)
- . 4) So literal they miss Spirit-filled principles. (I Cor. 2:6-16)
- . 5) Conform Scripture to a personal theological bias.
- . 6) Thinking logically to extreme or unbalanced conclusions.
- . 7) Arguing over minor points or monopolizing discussions.

#### **Motivations Of The Exhorter: Romans 12:8a**

“8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness..

We now come to the fourth motivational grace or gift listed in Romans 12. This is commonly called “exhortation.. Those wired with this motivational grace have a desire to see people grow and mature in their walk with God.

Paul himself serves as an example of this gift. He was constantly encouraging people to move to the next level. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 he even pictured himself as a nursing mother or an encouraging father in the way he sacrificed himself to care for the body of Christ. Let’s look at some of the strengths and weaknesses of those with this gift.

#### **4. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF EXHORTING: Romans 12:8a**

A. Example: Paul

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:12

C. Characteristics of this gift:

- . 1) Committed to seeing people grow and mature. (Col. 1:28)
- . 2) Quickly discern hindrances to growth. (I Cor. 3:1-7)
- . 3) Develops step-by-step plans to help people grow. (II Tim 2:22-23)
- . 4) Shares personal motivational stories to encourage hope.
- . 5. Can easily turn problems into benefits. (II Cor. 1:1-7)
- . 6) Gains wisdom and insight from personal experience.
- . 7) Seek sincere relational connection with people. (I Thess. 2:7-12)

D. Weaknesses inherent in this gift:

- . 1) Sacrifice family and loved ones to serve others.
- . 2) Tendency to become a “fix it” person in the lives of others.
- . 3) Become proud or take credit for the growth of others.
- . 4) Tendency to start new projects without finishing old ones.
- . 5) Turning people into projects rather than sincerely loving.
- . 6) Becoming overly transparent in sharing private stories.
- . 7) Avoid solid doctrine in favor of practical application.

#### **Motivations Of The Giver: Romans 12:8**

“8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” Romans 12:8

We now come to the gift of giving. Though every Christian should see themselves as stewards and give tithes and offerings, the giver has extra faith to earn wealth and give in huge ways.

I know one business owner that gives over 50% of his income to the tune of millions of dollars a year. I know another business owner who supports the salary of 600 pastors in less affluent countries. I know numerous godly farmers who give abundantly to missions. They have a gift of giving and God has blessed their personal lives as well.

Let's take a moment and look at the strengths and potential weaknesses of this grace gift.

#### MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF GIVING: Romans 12:8b

A. Example: Matthew (Luke 5:27-29)

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:13

C. Characteristics of this gift:

- . 1. Can easily see resources needed for the work.
- . 2) Often invests self with the gift and has an ability to save, invest wisely, often successful in business and understands money management.
- . 3) Desire to give high quality for lasting value.
- . 4) Desires that the gift matches a special need.
- . 5) Finds joy in giving secretly to worthwhile causes.
- . 6) Exercises personal thriftiness and is fiscally conservative.
- . 7) Uses giving approaches that motivate others to give.

D. Weaknesses inherent in gift:

- . 1. Hoarding resources for self if he doesn't believe in the cause.
- . 2) Using giving to control or manipulate others and watches financial reports very carefully.
- . 3) Sometimes feels guilty about personal success or assets.
- . 4) Give to projects instead of people.
- . 5) Reject pressure appeals for giving.
- . 6) Neglect providing for their own family to have more to give.
- . 7) Can unintentionally cause people to look to them for supply rather than to God.

#### **Motivations Of The Leader/Organizer: Romans 12:8c**

"8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Romans 12:8

We now come to the organizers. They are great at juggling details and planning events. They are the brains behind most mobilizing and pulling together successful ministries or events.

Without them all kinds of things fall through the cracks.

#### **6. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF ORGANIZING: Romans 12:8c**

A. Example: Nehemiah

B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:14

C. Characteristics of this gift:

- . 1) Able to visualize steps needed to complete task. (Neh. 2:7-8)
- . 2) Need for loyalty in his team. (Neh. 5:1-13)
- . 3) Ability to recruit others and delegate tasks. (Neh. 4:13)
- . 4) Can withstand critics and opposition to the task. (Neh. 4:8-18)
- . 5) Breaks the project down to many easy small jobs. (Neh. 3:1-32)
- . 6) Decisive and alert to details.
- . 7) Perseveres through to completion and clean up.

D. Weaknesses inherent in the gift:

- . 1) Viewing people as resources to complete a task.
- . 2) Showing favoritism to loyal people on the team.
- . 3) Misusing delegation to avoid personal work.



- . 4) Putting projects ahead of the value of people.
- . 5) Overlooking workers' faults or expressed needs.
- . 6) Failure to clearly explain a process or give credit to others.
- . 7) Forcing personal decisions or procedures on others.

### **The Motivational Grace of Mercy: Romans 12:8d**

“8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

John is a good example of this gift. He was called the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was very tuned into relationships and was the only disciple to record the story of the women caught in adultery. He was sensitive to hurting people or abused people. He had lots of mercy.

It should be noted that the persons with the motivations of prophecy and mercy often conflict with each other, but they really need each other. Let's look at the strengths and weaknesses of this gift.

### **7. MOTIVATIONAL GRACE OF MERCY: Romans 12:8d**

- A. Example: John
- B. Guiding Scripture: Romans 12:15
- C. Characteristic of the gift:
  - . 1) Deep loyalty to and defense of friends. (Luke 9:54)
  - . 2) Need for deep and affirming friendships. (John 21:7 &20)
  - . 3) Empathize with hurting people.
  - . 4) Tries not to hurt or offend people.
  - . 5) Attract people in distress or in crisis.
  - . 6) Measures acceptance by closeness.
  - . 7) Values the firmness of mature prophets.

### **D. Weaknesses inherent in the gift.**

- . 1) Take up the offenses of someone being hurt.
- . 2) Overlook faults to make things better for people.
- . 3) Failure to be firm with people in pointing out sin.
- . 4) Leaning on emotions rather than reason.
- . 5) Becoming emotionally attached to those being counseled.
- . 6) Bailing people out of facing consequences of sin.
- . 7) Cutting off insensitive people who are too hard on others.

### **Final Word on Motivational Gifts: Romans 12:6-8**

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

I believe that gifts are given to fill the gaps in our lives. No matter which of the seven motivational gifts you have, over time, and with spiritual maturity you should develop some proficiency with each gift. For example, everyone is called to serve, give, or show mercy, but the person with the gift of service will shine strong in the area of helping others. The giver will show extra faith and diligence in giving. In the same way, the merciful person will naturally pick up on the hurts of others.

Knowing someone's motivational gift will help you understand them better. Each gift is needed and the body of Christ is strongest when we are all working together. If you were to put all of the gifts together like a puzzle, they would give you a picture of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Beatitudes of the Gentile Church: Romans 12:9-18**

"9) Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11) not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12) rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13) contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16) Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17) Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

These verses are significant. It is almost like Paul is paraphrasing the beatitudes of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5:1-16. That text was given to the Jewish nation of Israel. But Paul was writing to the Gentile believers in Rome. He was not provoking division. Not by any means. He was calling God's people to be peacemakers and relational healers.

This context stands in total contrast to the jealousy, hate, and division being spread in our world today. If this Christian attitude had the power to reach the Roman Empire with the gospel, it can do the same to our modern broken world.

### **Biblical Attitude Toward Human Government. Romans 13:1-2**

"1) Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2) Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

Paul now launches into a discussion about human government. He observes that civil government is established by God. In the absence of government there will be chaos and anarchy. Ultimately all authority can be traced back to God. Those who resist the established government will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Is human government perfect? By no means. Can it become corrupt? As long as fallen humans govern there will be corruption. But is society better with a recognized system of law and order than with anarchy. Absolutely.

The great equalizer is that God holds governing authorities accountable. He can take down one king and establish another. Every leader is ultimately accountable to God.

This whole study is fascinating, because Paul is hammering out a Christian attitude toward government. He acknowledges that countries need a system of law, order, justice, trade and commerce policies, and national defense.

What is really fascinating is that Rome was in power at the time of his writing. He did not call for the overthrow of Rome, rather he focused on the Great Commission and the ability of the gospel to influence those in authority. He saw God as the ultimate authority and ruler.

### **Good Government: Romans 13:3-4**

“3) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.. When the government is in step with God, it is not a cause of fear for good behavior. Its purpose is to promote good and punish evil. Paul actually calls rulers “a minister of God for good.” Government exists to hold evil in check. Its purpose is not to step on freedom or oppress people. It should reward and praise good. Its role is to administer justice. It bears the sword for this reason. Most scholars agree that this is a reference to capital punishment. Government is “an avenger of God to bring wrath on the one who practices evil.” Those who rule should measure themselves by this text. God holds them accountable as His stewards of good. This text is written as much to the Governor as it is to the governed.

#### **Paul Makes A Case For Paying Taxes: Romans 13:6-7**

“6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7) Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

It is amazing the kind of things the Bible talks about. In this text it recognizes a place for government to collect taxes. Even in the Old Testament under Moses every male was taxed annually.

Government needs a way to pay for some services like national defense and infrastructure. Apart from taxes, government would be competing with the private sector in the manufacture and sale of goods and services as a revenue stream. That would be an unfair advantage. However, I believe government should remain as small and streamlined as possible. Every time government takes over a new public service it costs more and is less efficient. That’s as far as I dare go with this discussion and still keep it within the framework of Romans 13:6-7. As a Christian, I have no problem paying taxes so long as they are minimal, justified, and used with proper accountability. As a State Representative, I always looked for ways to cut taxes and streamline government. I believe freedom and small government are directly related to each other.

#### **The Non-political Nature of the Gospel: Romans 13:1-7**

“7) Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

This is going to be a shocking post for some to read. I would like to use Romans 13:1-7 to make an important observation; the Bible does not set up or establish one form of human government above another. Because the gospel was intended to go to every nation, tribe, and tongue it was designed to thrive under many forms of human government.

Joseph worked within an Egyptian system. Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar under a Babylonian system and when it fell he served Darius under a Medo-Persian system of government. During the days of the early church there was a Roman form of government in place.

I have worked extensively around the world. I have seen the gospel thrive under many forms of human government. It can function under a monarchy, a democracy, socialism, communism and even tribal councils. The Bible will influence morality, encourage integrity within a justice system, and impart a good work ethic, but it is not inherently political.

Christians are to recognize that their citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21) and their calling is to spread the gospel while living godly and peaceful lives. Paul's words in Romans 13:1-7 can be applied by Christians under any form of human government.

Christians should not be a threat to any government. In fact, because of their honesty and integrity, Christians should be looked at as an asset to any government. Daniel is a perfect example. He served with excellence under two very different forms of human government because of his walk with God.

The irony is that if countries like China or North Korea would grant religious freedom to Christians, they would soon discover their most loyal citizens. They would also see the blessing of God come upon their nations. Instead of ruling by fear, oppression, and exploitation they could rule by dignity and honor.

However, one point needs to be stressed. As government becomes corrupt and adopts an antiChrist agenda, Christians will most likely be targeted for persecution because of their biblical morality. May all suffering be for the gospel. Christians have suffered under every form of human government and the Bible has much to say about suffering for the gospel.

The challenge for every Christ is to live a godly and wholesome life with a clear conscience no matter their national heritage. Their focus should be the gospel and being fruitful for God. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we go through this life no matter where we live.

#### **Say Goodbye To Debt Slavery: Romans 13:8**

"8) Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."

Many look at this as an injunction against being in debt. Historically, debt was looked at as a kind of slavery. It came from the picture of the indentured servant. Proverbs 22:7 says, "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave..

Living on credit cards actually cuts your spending power substantially. It is a terrible financial position. Some credit card companies collect upwards of 20% interest. When banks pay less than 2% interest on money in a savings account, you can see that credit card companies are running a scam and making slaves of people.

God wants every Christian to trust Him for needs and put their financial house in order. That means get out of debt and learn how money works. Jesus spoke extensively about financial principles.

A good starting point would be taking a Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University course. You might want to argue with some of his points, but he has helped millions of people get out of debt and discover the peace of mind that comes with being financially free and investing wisely. I would encourage you to start early and establish a good savings and investing plan. Little can be much over time and with good discipline. Soon you will be able to put God first in your giving, especially when you have something to give.

#### **Amazing Agape Love: Romans 13:8-10**

"8) Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9) For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law..

Paul now makes the case that love is the fulfillment of the law. Jesus introduced this idea in the four gospels related to the Old Testament Law, but in this context Paul expands it to civil law. True agape love will do no ill will toward others.

Verse 10 is the summary of this principle; "Love does no wrong to a neighbor, love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." It is much easier to live by love than it is to be legalistic and try to keep the full Old Testament law code in mind. And I might add, you will be much happier and easier to be around.

One way to look at this is to understand that the Law is an outgrowth of the character and nature of God. The Holy Spirit shares the holiness of God. 1 John 4:8 & 16 both say that "God is love."

When the Holy Spirit indwells the new believer at the moment of salvation, He brings the character and nature of God with Him. That includes Agape love and the full range of the fruit of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:16-24)

We now have a reference back to Romans 5:5. The Holy Spirit pours out this love in the heart of the new believer. As Christians learn to walk in this love, it becomes a shield about them from wrong and fleshly behavior. In other words, agape love will keep you out of all kinds of trouble and place you in the center of God's will.

Sometimes it's easier to live and get along in the world than in the church. True agape love makes the believer shine as a light in the darkness of the world. This opens the door for manifold ministry opportunities if you are alert to the people around you.

But 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 makes the case that living by agape love is also the key to a thriving church community. Your interaction with all people, both Christian and non-Christian should be anchored in agape love. The gospel is most convincing when surrounded by genuine agape love.

### **Changing Times: Romans 13:11-14**

"11) Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12) The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 13) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Paul now drives home the point why living in Agape love from the previous three verses was so important. Times can change quickly. A little history lesson may be in order.

For the most part, the Christians in Rome refused to participate in the social and civic life of ordinary Romans that was laced with pagan worship and sexual immorality. Christians were generally disliked as being judgemental. Then on July 19, AD 64 a fire broke out in Rome destroying ten of the fourteen districts. Two of the remaining districts had the largest Christian population. Blame was soon laid at their feet. The Apostle Paul himself was presumably put to death in AD 68.

Times were also changing fast back in Palestine. Darkness was coming on society. The relative calm during the days of Jesus were quickly vanishing. Rome was also blaming the Jews for the calamity. Four years of unrest culminated in AD 70 when a Roman army marched into Jerusalem and destroyed everything including the temple.

Christians saw the prophetic warning of the pending destruction and many fled Jerusalem. Jesus Himself had warned about the destruction of the temple. (See Mark 13:1-2) Times were very difficult and persecution was everywhere. Christians bore the brunt of the suffering. When times change... it can be felt. It is like a pressure cooker. Things start heating up until the release valve sounds the alarm. As Paul was writing the alarm was beginning to sound. He was forewarning the Christians and telling them to wake up. He felt the return of Christ was imminent.

I believe an alarm is also sounding in our day. Times are changing. It is time for Christians to wake up. Amazing prophetic days are quickly approaching. It is time to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.

#### **A New Day Dawning: Romans 13:11-14**

“11) Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12) The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

This text takes some serious pondering. As noted in the previous post, the times were changing. Difficult times were mounting. Nevertheless, Paul was using language of a new day dawning. Verse 12 says; “The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand.. This seems like a reference to the return of Christ. Paul believed in the imminent return of Jesus. He sincerely thought that Jesus might return in his days.

In the midst of dark times of persecution, he saw the dawn on the horizon. “Salvation was nearer to them than when they believed.. Why did he see the dawn of a new day on the horizon. I believe it was because God was at work in extraordinary ways.

Therefore, he called them to godly and holy living in keeping with 1 Joh. 2:28. Like John, he did not want believers to shrink away from Jesus in shame at His sudden return. Paul did not focus on the rise of the anti-Christ even though Rome matched the description, instead he focused on the return of Christ. What a radically different perspective from the modern church.

This brings up some crucial points for our serious consideration. Contrary to all of the gloom and doom talk of the end times, the early church was having a very different conversation that carried them through hard times. They were not fixated on the end, they were focused on the new day that would accompany the return of Christ. Let that sink in!

The modern church has adopted erroneous theology from many pagan religions that talk about a cataclysmic end of planet earth. Stop! The Bible paints a radically different picture. Though the antiChrist will bring difficult times, Jesus is about to overthrow his malicious plans with His glorious return and millennial reign on earth. (See Revelation 20:1-20)

In the meantime, nothing will hinder the work of God in and through the true church. In fact, I believe times of great revival and awakening will come upon the bride preparing her to meet her Groom. According to Ephesians 5:26-27, Jesus is going to sanctify, cleanse, and wash the church with His Word, “27) That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless..

This view is in keeping with Paul’s appeal in Romans 13:12-14. Paul was imploring the church to put aside the deeds of darkness in preparation of the new day. He wanted them to “behave

properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.. (Vs 13. Rather, he wanted them to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” (Vs 14)

This should be the conversation and focus of the church today! Rather than promoting fear, we should be embracing the blessed hope of the return of Christ.

### **Navigating Personal Opinions: Romans 14:1-4**

“1) Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2) One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3) The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4) Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand..

Paul now tackles a subject that can divide churches and leave Christians needlessly at odds with one another. This relates to the whole subject of personal opinions, convictions, and preferences not associated with essential Biblical doctrines.

Paul starts by talking about “the one who is weak in faith.. These might be newer believers who are not biblically grounded. The goal is to build up and edify and not to tear down or pass judgment.

The example he uses both here and in 1 Corinthians 8:8-13 is diet. Many Christians in his day adopted a vegetarian diet because much of the meat available in the marketplace had been sacrificed to idols or not killed in a kosher manner or eaten raw. Keep in mind, Paul was living in the regions of Rome and Greece. The food was very different from his Jewish heritage.

But for the sake of the gospel, Paul decided to become all things to all people. (See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) It doesn’t take long in mission work to discover how radically different foods, spices, and diets are in different regions around the world.

People enjoy serving their local foods just to watch your reaction. For the sake of the gospel, I have eaten all kinds of ethnic foods. In many cases over time I have developed a taste for them. I will spare you the list of things I have eaten. When my taste buds protest violently, vegetables are always there to rescue me. It’s hard to ruin a carrot.

As a side note, I’ve learned it only takes three or four mission trips to the same region to develop a taste for ethnic foods. For some reason, eating a local ethnic diet creates an amazing bond with people that can transcend a language barrier. It can open a door for the gospel. This is a very significant observation.

The problem comes when people make things like a diet a test of spirituality. The same holds true for keeping various holidays, political opinions, or even loyalty to a sports team.

If you want to refrain from celebrating Christmas or Easter, that’s totally fine with me. I understand your objections. But I choose to use them as a bridge for the gospel. When a secular holiday points to the birth or resurrection of Jesus Christ, I’m running through that open door as fast as I can.

Here is a big clue! If you haven’t figured it out yet; good Christians will often have different convictions from one another. Some have no problem drinking wine, while others abstain from alcohol completely. This battlefield is not my calling!

Many godly old saints refused to go to a movie theater until The Passion of the Christ was released. God has sent some very gifted Christians into the movie industry to produce wholesome movies and some movies with an amazing gospel message. I thank God for them. As you can imagine, this is a very delicate subject because some convictions can be sinful. This is where spiritual growth, discernment, and a commitment to discipleship steps up to the plate. For Paul, the goal was building up and not tearing down. Adopt the approach of compassionate encouragement rather than harsh judgment as your mode of operation. The important thing is to keep the important things the important things. Focus on the great commission. Build bridges and point people to Jesus. Then in some cases... learn to celebrate your differences.

### **Celebrate Freedom: Romans 14:5-6**

"5) One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6) He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

This text highlights the fact that there is a lot of freedom in the Christian life. The Old Testament was filled with special days and even weeks set aside for religious ceremonies. Everything from the Sabbath, to the Passover and the feast of booths were carefully observed. These are just a few. The book of Esther also established the Feast of Purim. (Esther 9:20-22)

These were significant celebrations for the Jewish people and great teaching opportunities that captured Jewish history. But as the gospel spread to non-Jewish nations around the world, mandating the keeping of Jewish ceremonies that captured their historical story became burdensome and not so relevant. This forced a huge dilemma on the early church. Which days and Jewish holidays from the Old Testament should be forced on Gentile believers and which were not necessary?

Another challenge became equally as difficult. Should the Christian church start its own holidays to capture its history? For example, should the church worship on the Sabbath to celebrate the finished work of Creation which was the last day of the week, or should they worship on Resurrection Day which was the first day of the week? This day marked the finish of the new creation based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This was a huge issue in the early church that was not easily settled. Of course, there was also the issue of Christmas and Easter. Should these become formal Christian holidays? The history they try to capture is paramount to Christianity.

Thankfully, the text we are looking at today addressed this issue in a very unique way. Rather than starting a whole new series of religious ceremonies and holidays, the early church granted liberty and freedom of choice. It left it open for every believer to worship God with freedom of conscience in these areas. They were free to worship God on the last day of the week, the first day of the week... or both. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. (2 Corinthians 3:17) Satan has used these issues to divide the church. Early in my Christian walk, I used to take sides in these discussions and some even became a bit heated. Now I just bless those who differ from me and praise God that they are seeking Him. In fact, I have no problem joining them in worship and celebrating Jesus. I have had great times worshiping with Messianic Jewish congregations around the world. They have insights into the Old Testament that put me to shame.



So what was Paul saying in this text? I believe he was granting amazing freedom and liberty in putting Christian ceremony and worship together. You have the freedom to be liturgical or non-liturgical. You can be traditional or non-traditional. You can worship with old hymns or new worship songs. You can use a variety of instruments or sing without any. You can meet in a cathedral, in a church with pews, in a pole barn style building with chairs, in a home church, or under a mango tree. It doesn't matter!

It might surprise you, but there is no real pattern for a Christian worship service, wedding ceremony, or funeral given in the Bible. As a pastor, this used to frustrate me. When I started doing world missions my small box was shattered. I've seen and been involved in some of the most glorious worship services and wedding ceremonies you could ever imagine. Africa and India stand out as the most unique. Leave your watch at home, it means nothing to them. To summarize, love and worship Jesus with all your heart, soul, and mind with great sincerity. Welcome creativity and variety. Preach and teach the solid Word of God and invite the Holy Spirit into your gatherings. Expect worship to be a two-way venue. Praise and lift up Jesus and expect the Holy Spirit to speak to His people. Celebrate freedom in Christ within the bounds of holiness.

### **Making Your Life Count: Romans 14:7-9**

"7) For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8) for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9) For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

It has been said that "no man is an island unto himself." Our lives affect others for either good or bad. Paul was laying down this principle in these verses.

"7) Not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself.. In Philippians 1:20-26, Paul applied this principle to his own life. He was determined to glorify God and minister to others both in life and in death. Most people are familiar with Philippians 1:21. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Every Christian should share this conviction.

One of Satan's strategies is to plague us with the thought that we don't matter. He wants us to feel insignificant and worthless. It is a lie. Every person has value simply because they were created in the image of God. We all touch and influence people around us.

I encourage you to dedicate your life to God. Purpose to live for His glory. Be a channel of His love within your sphere of influence. Celebrate your life and let your light shine. Through the grace of God, be the difference that makes a difference.

The flip side of the coin says that bad people also leave a mark on others. Those who cheat, steal, curse, use, abuse, violate, or wound others contribute to the decay of society. "No one is an island unto themselves.. Our actions matter and God will hold us accountable for every thought, word and deed. Life is not fair in this fallen world, but justice will one day come.

My goal and purpose is to do my best to live on the God side of the coin. I have dedicated my life to Jesus and invited the Holy Spirit to live and work through me for good and for the glory of God. I encourage you to do the same.

Just as coins are designed to be spent, so every life will be spent for something. Do as Paul and many others have done, purpose to spend your life for the glory of God. Make each day count. Add value to others as you journey through this life. Leave your world a better place than before you walked through it.

### **Acknowledge God as Judge: Romans 14:10-12**

“10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? 11) For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.” 11) So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”

There is a lot packed into these three verses. Let me try to peel them open just a bit so we can peer inside.

Two things go hand-in-hand in the Bible. The first is the freedom of choice. God grants every person the freedom to decide their own path through life. He does not force His will on anyone. The second is personal accountability. We will all one day stand before God and give an account for our lives. This is true for both the theologian and the atheist. God is the ultimate authority. All freedom comes from Him and all accountability is due to Him. He is the judge. The above two realizations leave me sober-minded and respectful of others.

The implication is that we do not need to judge one another. We are called to share the gospel, speak and live biblical truth, point people to a fear and reverence for God, and live our lives with a free and clear conscience. Beyond that, we let God do His work in each person's life.

But let's take another big step in our thinking. The consciousness of the existence of God and future accountability to Him is the deterrence for evil in the world. When God is removed from public consciousness, society rapidly moves into depravity and tyranny takes the throne. In the absence of God, freedoms are lost, personal value and dignity are trampled under foot, and government policies become immoral and oppressive. (See Romans 1:18-32. This is the thesis Paul used to open the book of Romans.

The knowledge of the God of the Bible is the single greatest guarantee of freedom and justice in society. Future accountability to Him as the ultimate Judge places every person on notice for their actions. From the President in the Oval Office to the homeless person on the street, each one is equally accountable to God for their thoughts, deeds, and actions.

We all fall short, but His grace and help are available to any and all who acknowledge Him and invite Jesus into their life. He can forgive the sin and turn any life around. Salvation changes people. I work harder on myself than anything else in life. As God changes me, everything around me begins to change.

Here is a big kicker in these verses. When we judge other people, we make ourselves into little gods. Those are big shoes to fill. No man or woman is worthy of that role. It assumes we are omniscient and know all things. Only God has that attribute.

The opposite also sometimes happens. Being a pastor, some people change their behavior around me. I tell them, “Don't try to impress me, my opinion doesn't matter. God is the One you will one day stand before to give an account..

Grace is discovering that now so you can make the necessary changes in your life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Don't wait until you stand before Him to humbly bow your knee. Confess Him now and seek His grace and help.

### **Exchanging Personal Liberties for Agape Love: Romans 14:13-23**

“13) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14) I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15) For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to

love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. 16) Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

A judgmental and critical spirit does little to advance the kingdom of God. To the contrary, it is often negative. Rather than putting others down, we should do everything we can to build them up in their faith and walk with God. This includes not becoming a stumbling block to them.

Paul defended Christian liberty so long as it did not become a stumbling block to others. This was especially true in his day related to food and drink. He recognized that all foods were clean, including meats sold outside of a pagan temple that had been sacrificed to idols. Evidently, it was sold at a significant discount in the market or served in restaurants connected to the temple.

Paul argued that this meat was technically ok, but for some it was a snare back into idolatry and pagan practices. (See also 1 Corinthians 8:1-13) As an evangelist seeking to reach non-believers, Paul had no problem eating this food or dining in places where it may have been served. But he also understood that this liberty was a real stumbling block for some Christians.

As a result, Paul set aside his personal liberty to eat this food for the sake of the gospel.

In Romans 14:15, Paul shared that limiting a personal liberty for the sake of others translated into walking by love. Living by Agape love was more important to Paul than a good steak or quality wine. His number one goal was reaching people with the gospel and building them up in Christ.

So how do we apply this principle to our culture? I look at the stumbling blocks that are destroying people today and work back from there with sensitivity and discernment. Alcohol is a big one in our culture. Therefore, our house is alcohol-free. We do not want our children or grandchildren trapped in a generational iniquity that devastated previous generations in my family history. I may occasionally have a glass of wine, but for the most part, I abstain. I have many friends who could be set up for personal failure if I were to endorse alcohol through my social drinking. This personal liberty is not worth the damage it could cause others.

My humor and entertainment appetite is another big area. I shun negative or off color humor and screen out sensual movies, novels, tv shows, and websites. Sexual addiction is a plague in our society. I refuse to contribute to sexploitation or the sex trafficking industry through my leisure entertainment.

A final area relates to marriage and family break-down. We have been married for over forty years and have had our share of struggles. Through some of these times, I have felt like taking the easy way out and throwing in the towel. But I recognize that Satan would have a field day with our failure. As Paul mentioned earlier in this chapter, “no man lives unto himself.” Years ago when we closed the door of divorce in our thinking and conversations with each other, God gave us the grace and fortitude to work through our struggles and arrive at a good marriage. It has also helped us find answers to struggles that other marriages face. As a result, our marriage toolbox has grown significantly. God can and does change struggling marriages. We have seen many terrible marriages become good over time.

I don’t know what your selfish liberty is, that is your battlefield. You need to invite the Holy Spirit to help you work through this principle. On the one hand, don’t become legalistic or judgmental with your personal convictions. On the other hand, meet others where they are and purpose to

build them up for the glory of God. The principle Paul laid down in this text is significant for our day.

### **Removing The Stench Of Carnality: Romans 14:19-23**

“19) So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20) Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21) It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22) The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker. Purpose to build others up and not tear them down. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of your own selfish and worthless agenda.

One of the signs of maturity and godliness is the ability to die to self for the sake of God and others. Self-discipline and learning to say “no” to the flesh is the backbone of fruitful ministry and productivity in life. Until you take up your own cross and die to your own hamburger and french fries (or whatever you treasure more than the ministry God has put before you), you are far from walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Sinful carnality is behind every conflict whether in the marriage or family, in the church or on the job. As long as you push yourself you are not walking by faith or serving the kingdom of God. If things are to change, you must first change.

The starting point of revival and awakening is drawing a circle on the floor, stepping inside and then earnestly praying for revival. Your first and foremost prayer must be that God starts His deep and fresh transformation within your circle first. If the Holy Spirit is being grieved in your life, don’t export your faith to others.

The flesh cannot serve or please God. If the stench of drama and conflict follows you like stink on a skunk, you better revisit Romans 8:1-17. If you smell a skunk it’s because you are close to a skunk. If the smell never leaves, you are most likely the source of the stink. The deeds of the flesh smell far worse than any skunk. Only repentance, the blood of Jesus, and the washing of the Word can remove the stink of carnality.

### **Learning To Serve and Carry Others: Romans 15:1-3**

“1) Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2) Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3) For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”.

There are two very different philosophies about life. The first says we should live to serve self. We should be number one and always look out for our own interests first. The second says we should live to serve others. We should see ourselves as number two and consciously look out for the needs of others before self. I have found the second approach to be much more rewarding and it opens the door for friendship and genuine ministry.

In this text, Paul introduces a third concept. Those who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength. Human nature has a tendency of looking down on the weak and vulnerable. Some see them as easy targets for exploitation, but Paul says they are candidates for Agape love and ministry.

Throughout His public ministry, Jesus always gravitated toward those with needs. He was there for the hungry, sick, downcast, and needy. He was the Great Physician and Great Provider. He ministered to the needs of others before His own. Had He come with a different mindset, He would have never gone to the cross for lost humanity.

True ministry starts the moment you take your eyes off from yourself and start noticing the needs of others. With guidance from the Holy Spirit and practice, many doors for fruitful ministry will start to open before you. When you walk through them and truly start carrying others who are weaker than you, you will discover the power of edification. It will change you.

You will move from being a taker to being a giver. Instead of draining others you will begin to fill others. Instead of criticizing you will start encouraging. Instead of tearing down you will start building up. Instead of complaining and being negative about everything, your attitudes will change. You will become positive and find ample reason for rejoicing. Like magic, your world will begin to change before you. The storm clouds will roll away and the sun will begin to shine. I can't explain it, but as you learn to serve others life begins to smile at you. Soon your lonely world will be filled with friendships and many of those friends will begin to blossom as you shower them with Jesus and His love.

This is the Christian life as Jesus modeled it. But notice, He lived this kind of life daily among people. He cared for the needs of people as He encountered them along the highways and byways of life. As a result he became a radiant light of hope in an otherwise dark world. Soon crowds were following Him. We can conclude that Agape love servanthood is the pathway to "Jesus-like" influence and ministry. John 15 says, "if you want to bear fruit... abide in the vine." Go out and be Jesus to your world!

#### **The Importance of Daily Bible Study: Romans 15:4-6**

"4) For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5) Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6) so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

From Paul's vantage point, he was referring back to the Old Testament. He himself was a Bible scholar. He was constantly studying the scrolls of Scripture.

There is huge value in studying your Old Testament. Everything recorded there was written for our instruction, perseverance, and encouragement. The bottom line is that a solid foundation in the Old Testament gives perspective and hope.

This text reminds me of 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. In those verses Paul elaborates on some key Old Testament stories and shares how important they are for our instruction. Common sense, wisdom, instruction, and an understanding of God and His ways are all packed into the Old Testament.

God has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you want to serve Him you have to get to know Him through His self-revelation in the Bible. Much of that revelation is found in the Old Testament.

My daily Bible reading includes both the Old and New Testaments. Set aside the other books, videos, and commentaries until you have first given ample time to daily Bible reading. This practice is intended to bring unity and common praise and worship to God's people.

My experience over many years of ministry is that conflicts, erroneous belief systems, and relational tensions in the family and church can be traced to biblical illiteracy. 2 Timothy 2:10-17 establishes the vital role of the Scriptures in building godly men and women. You will never become the fruitful, godly, mature, and Spirit-filled man or woman God wants you to be without feeding daily on His Word.

### **Accepting Christians Who Are Different From You: Romans 15:7-12**

“7) Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8) For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9) and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Your name.” 10) Again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” 11) And again, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.” 12) Again Isaiah says, “There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him shall the Gentiles hope.””

Jesus was specifically sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They had the first chance to welcome the Messiah, but they rejected Him. (See John 1:10-13) Though many believed, the nation as a whole rejected and crucified Him. The end result was that after His resurrection the Great Commission was to take the gospel to the entire world. (Matthew 28:18-20)

In this text in Romans, Paul quotes numerous Old Testament passages that show God had a plan to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. God loves all the people of the world, and Jesus died for all people. (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2)

This theology is very basic to the gospel, but as you can imagine, it was a lot easier preaching the gospel to all people than it was getting them to love and accept one another in the early church. The early church as it spread out from Palestine was made up of very diverse people with radically different cultures. How did they decide what was acceptable and what was not? The answer came down to the distinction between moral sin and neutral cultural expressions. If a behavior was fleshy and sinful, it was confessed and repented from. The Ten Commandments basically defined sinful behavior. But cultural expressions like ethnic foods, dress style, music, or some holidays were covered by graceful acceptance of one another. Though Jesus was Jewish, Christianity was much broader and designed to be intra-cultural.

Paul was wrestling through these tensions in this text. Which issues were moral and which were cultural? What differences in others can I accept in Christian love, and where does a different cultural expression spill into sinful living? These are difficult questions!

Paul’s broad solution was Romans 15:7, “Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” That means that you serve people of different cultural expressions, while helping them grow toward holiness in Christ.

Over the years I have traveled and ministered extensively across North America and around the world. If you walk into a country church in Western Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana or even parts of Texas, you will be greeted by many people in cowboy boots and ten gallon hats. You quickly discover your Midwestern dress is out of place.

The same is true for a church potluck in Alaska. You will be served salmon, moose steak, caribou, and maybe black bear roast. Anything with blueberries is especially welcomed. The conversations with the locals will revolve around aviation, hunting, fishing, and getting the equipment ready for the next gathering season whatever that might be. It may also include

winter vacation plans to sunny Hawaii to ward off depression in the dark months. Tourists and newcomers stick out like a sore thumb.

As you travel to Central or South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, Mongolia, or the Far East, the cultural expressions are even more diverse. At that point, people not only dress and eat differently, they also look very different.

So... what is Christian and what is not? What does the gospel change and what does it accept? Can worship music, church buildings, church services, funerals, and weddings honor local culture and still be Christian. How do you define moral and immoral boundaries under the gospel while accepting cultural expressions? How should a Mongolian Christian differ from a secular Mongolian?

Ok, enough examples of what the early church was wrestling with in these final chapters of the book of Romans. As you can see, we face these same issues today. May Jesus guide you as you seek to be holy within your expression of style and culture and learn to love and accept others who differ from you.

### **Major Inner Difference. Romans 15:13**

“13) Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Knowing God leaves people full of hope. The God of the Bible is the God of hope. The Bible presents the picture of life beyond this life. For the believer, it is called eternal life. This present mortal life will be swallowed up by immortality for all eternity. 1 Corinthians 15:33-58 tells the story.

The result is joy and peace in believing. These are not artificial emotions. They are the byproduct of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-24 includes them in a list of eight fruits of the Spirit.

Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruit.. (See the full context of Matthew 7:15-23. Anyone can be religious, but only a born-again Christian can produce the fruit of the Spirit!

Keep in mind, in the verse we are looking at today, Paul was writing to Romans. Joy and peace were not the byproduct of Roman life or society. Life was hard in Rome. War was a constant. Many people-groups had been conquered and turned into slaves. Significant numbers of people were geographically uprooted against their will.

This was part of what made the gospel message so appealing in Rome. The Holy Spirit brought inner hope, joy, and peace to people in otherwise hopeless situations.

The late Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who helped shelter Jewish people from the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. Because of her family's actions, the ten Boom family were all arrested or died in concentration camps. Corrie herself survived a long stay in Ravensbruck concentration camp where she lost her sister Betsie. She later had a world-wide ministry and wrote her most famous book called “The Hiding Place.”

As a new Christian back in 1973, I heard Corrie speak of her ordeal at Ravensbruck. After sharing about the terrible conditions they endured, she talked about their secret Bible studies and prayer meetings. Then Corrie said; “We would look within and be depressed. We would look without and be repressed. But we would look to Jesus and be impressed!” That struck me like a lightning bolt.

She captured what Paul was talking about in this verse. She was pointing to their experience of the inner fruit produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit even during the darkest trials of life. The

Holy Spirit is the source of inner power, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. He brings inner tranquility in the midst of the storm.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs points to this inner tranquility experienced consistently by the early Christian martyrs. I have witnessed it over and over again by Christians around the world. Some were in refugee camps. Others live in abject poverty. Still others were wealthy business people who were dedicated to Jesus. Many were in the waiting room at hospitals as they prayed for loved ones in surgery or who were about to be promoted to glory.

Believers have an inner hope, joy, and peace that the non-Christian world cannot duplicate. I believe it is the witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If this is absent in your life, I encourage you to turn to Jesus in sincere faith. Invite Him to sit on the throne of your life. Step down and let Him reign. Open your heart to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Paul Explains His Calling: Romans 15:14-16**

“14) And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15) But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16) to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul recognized that the Gentile believers under the shadow of Rome were making great strides toward maturity and leadership development. They were full of goodness, becoming knowledgeable in the things of God, and were doing a commendable job of ministering to one another.

But as the Apostle to the Gentiles he wanted to fulfill his ministry. (See Galatians 2:7-10) He wanted to do a thorough job of disciple-making. He understood that he had a short time on earth and wanted the Gentile church to be totally established in the faith.

In verse 16 he makes the statement he was “ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.. I believe he was using the priesthood as an analogy of his anointing and calling from God. He saw himself as “set aside for the gospel” just as a priest was set aside for his office. (See Romans 1:1)

Paul took his calling, his ministry and the gospel very seriously. Paul had the charge to both define and defend the gospel. (See Philippians 1:7) He was the Apostle God raised up to lay down the doctrine of justification by faith and defend the gospel message with his very life. According to Galatians 2:11-21, he even took Peter to task over the pure application of the gospel. He did not want the gospel message watered down or confused with keeping the Law or false legalism.

It is very easy for people to be religious but lost. Paul took every opportunity afforded him to rehearse, define, and defend the gospel. The book of Romans stands out as his classic defense of the gospel to the entire Christian world.

Make it your goal to master the book of Romans and clearly communicate the gospel message. Do not let the gospel message become watered down or confused with religion. It must be vigorously defended today with the same fervor and diligence of the Apostle Paul.

#### **Extraordinary Calling: Romans 15:17-20**



“17) Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. 18) For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19) in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20) And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation;”

Though not yet a Christian during the public ministry of Jesus, Saul quickly moved from being an opponent of the gospel to becoming the greatest proponent of the gospel. His identity and name was changed to The Apostle Paul. He carried the gospel into the Gentle regions west of Palestine.

His ministry was accompanied with a mighty anointing of the Holy Spirit. God performed extraordinary miracles through him to confirm the gospel message much as He did through Peter, John, and the other Apostles. There was no doubting his calling.

I personally look at the Ephesians 4:11 gifts of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers” as post-Pentecost gifts given for the church age. I look at the “apostles” in this verse as the “missionaries” called, gifted, and sent out by the Holy Spirit to start new works. They were not appointed by Jesus during His public ministry, but rather anointed and sent out by the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. (See Acts 11:23-26; Acts 13:1-4)

The word “Apostle” literally means “sent out”. Though the word “missionary” does not appear in the Bible, Paul and others filled this role. They were called, anointed, and sent out to start new works. Many times they were multi-gifted people and willing to carry a heavy load and do whatever was necessary to plant a new church.

In Romans 15:20 Paul expressed his missionary heart. He wanted to go to the unreached. He was a visionary. He wanted to be a pioneer and preach the gospel to the unreached. He was constantly reaching new people and making disciples. He was raising up gifted leaders around him and placing them as pastors and elders in the church God was planting through him. Jesus Christ and spreading the gospel was his passion in life.

Some wonder why the Holy Spirit worked so mightily through Paul. I believe Hebrews 2:3-4 provides the answer. God always shows up on the front lines of spreading the gospel to bear witness of Himself. He confirms the gospel message with signs that follow. When you look at most of the miracles in the book of Acts, they happened on the front lines of spreading the gospel. God used them to open doors and confirm the message.

The same often happens today. The Holy Spirit usually works mightily on the front lines of sharing the gospel. If you want to see God work in greater ways, make sharing the gospel a priority again. Note, you will also encounter greater opposition and spiritual warfare on the front lines.

I often refer to it as “Surfing on the wake of the supernatural.. Catch a wave for the glory of God and join the Holy Spirit where He is working. Don’t quench the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, or seek to control the Holy Spirit. Remember, Jesus is Lord. Our calling is to follow Him, just as Paul and the early believers did.

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. The power of the Holy Spirit is no different today than in the early church. What has changed is prayer and our focus on spreading the gospel. We have pulled back from a radical commitment to the Great Commission. When we

move back to the front lines of reaching the lost with the gospel, we encounter God again in amazing ways. He was there all the time.

### **A Glimpse Into Paul's Heart: Romans 15:17-29**

"22) For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 23) but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24) whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while— 25) but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26) For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

Paul was always looking to the regions beyond. He wanted to boldly go where no man had gone before with the gospel. In the previous several years he had done a fabulous job of ministry and church planting in Macedonia and Achaia. He left behind strong churches and good leadership. Now he was setting his sights on Rome and beyond that, even Spain. He was ready to carry the gospel to the Spanish-speaking world. The gospel was on the move westward through Paul while Thomas was pressing eastward as far as India. Others were moving southward into Africa. The early church was aggressive with the Great Commission.

In this context, Paul mentioned he was ready to make a trip to Jerusalem. He had no idea how providential that trip would be. He was about to be arrested, put on trial, and appeal to Caesar. He was about to be sent to Rome as a prisoner. During a shipwreck, he would preach the gospel on the island of Malta. (See Acts 28)

During his first stay in prison in Rome, Paul wrote many of his New Testament Epistles. God's Word is not bound. He was free to have many visitors and shared the gospel with both soldiers and people from Caesar's own household. (See Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22) Many became believers.

Some believe Paul was released from prison for a brief time. During that reprieve he may have traveled up into Italy and even reached as far as Spain. (Hebrews 13:22-25) These words at the end of the book of Hebrews is what prompts many to believe the book of Hebrews was also written by Paul. Note especially the mention of Timothy.

The big takeaway from Romans 15:17-29 is that Paul always had missions and the spread of the gospel foremost in his mind and heart. His single life ambition was to spread the gospel. Every Christian throughout history who has read the New Testament is part of the fruit of his labor. What an amazing testimony of the ways of God and the power of the gospel!

The modern church must recapture this missionary mindset. Every generation needs to hear the gospel. Our challenge today is great. We may be the last generation prior to the return of Jesus.

### **Special Relief Giving: Romans 15:26-29**

"26) For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27) Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28) Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29) I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ..

Paul now devotes attention to the financial gift collected by the Gentile Christians scattered across Macedonia and Achaia for the suffering Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem. This gives

us a peek into the giving philosophy of the early church. They supported one another with financial means when necessary.

Because of mounting persecution, the Jewish Christians were suffering tragic loss. Some were publicly humiliated. Others had their homes and properties seized. They were very difficult times.(See Hebrews 10:33-34). 2 Corinthians 8-9 gives additional background to this special gift.

The whole concept of humanitarian support and relief giving was important to the early church. They took care of one another during times of persecution, famine, natural disasters, and plagues. It was a way to show love and compassion while paving the way for the gospel.

This is one area that the modern church has ample opportunity to step up and have a huge impact. Needs abound around the world.

We started GoServ Global with the goal of becoming a trustworthy and reliable Christian organization that focuses on spreading the gospel during difficult times. Go to our webpage and check out our philosophy and the impact we are having in many places. I encourage you to adopt us as your go-to Christian relief organization.

### **Answered Prayers: Romans 15:30-33**

“30) Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, 31) that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32) so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. 33) Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen..

In this text, Paul entreats the Roman Christians to pray for him as he prepared for his trip to Jerusalem. The wording of this request indicates to me that he was prepared for persecution and hardship in Jerusalem. Let’s briefly look at how his trip unfolded.

During his farewell address at Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, he makes an insightful concession; “22) And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23) except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24) But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:22-24

Paul was resolved to lay his life down for Jesus and the gospel. God through His Spirit often prepares His people for difficult times to come. He wants us to be prepared. There is great comfort in Jesus Christ and the love of the Spirit as we walk through the ups and downs of this life.

The fulfillment of this text and Romans 15:30-33 both unfold in Acts 21-28. Paul’s trip to Jerusalem was anything but smooth. He was attacked in the temple by an angry mob from among the Jewish people. The Roman guard rescued him from the Jews but prepared to scourge him themselves. He was spared from this plight because he was a Roman citizen. Again, a plot to take his life by a mob of Jewish men who vowed to kill him was averted. We can see that God answered his request from Romans 15: 31 that he might be spared from the disobedient in Judea.

What happened next became a fulfillment of Acts 9:15. Paul begins to “testify before the Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel.” Paul testifies before the Jewish council, Felix, Festus,

Agrippa, and eventually Caesar himself. As was his calling, he faithfully preached Jesus and the gospel to them.

In the end, he was safely brought to Rome. God even gave him a group of Roman soldiers to protect him all the way to Rome. It appears that a number of them became believers. (See Philippians 1:12-14) God does indeed answer prayer, but often colors in the details in very creative ways.

### **The Unsung Heroes of Missions: Romans 16:1-2**

“1) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2) that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

Paul now comes to his conclusion to the book of Romans. As is his custom, he uses his conclusion for introductions or personalized greetings.

In these first two verses, Paul introduces Phoebe, who was a deaconess at the church in Cenchrea. Some believe that she was part of the delegation charged to help carry this letter to Rome.

She was undoubtedly a godly and dignified woman for Paul says she was to be received in a manner worthy of the “saints.” (Vs 2) This word signifies “a holy or sanctified one.” She was by no means worldly or given to wanton pleasures. She was dedicated and set aside for Jesus. By all indications, she was unmarried. Some believe she was mature in years and had a ministry to younger women. The believers in Rome were to take care of her needs because she was a helper to many, including Paul himself. She was an active part of the ministry team. I like this entry in the text because it shows that godly women had an active ministry role in the early church. She may have filled a teaching role for women in the early church. Whatever the case, she was called, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for a broad and effective ministry at large in the early church. She seemed to have an itinerant ministry.

The same holds true for the modern missionary force around the world today. A significant number of them are single women. God is using them to move mountains in many places and shore up manifold needs on these fields.

From my broad traveling ministry, I can say that single women who are sacrificing and serving Jesus in many roles are the unsung heroes of the modern missionary movement. They outnumber single men four to one. Like Anna in Luke 2:36-38, they are often the prayer warriors and fire watchers undergirding the ministry. We owe them a debt of gratitude. I welcome them, commend them, and I celebrate them. To God be the glory!

### **Ministry Couples: Romans 16:3-5**

“3) Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4) who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 4) also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia..

Paul now sends a greeting to his beloved Prisca and Aquila. They were the tent-making couple that he worked with for a while when he first arrived in Corinth. (See Acts 18:2-3.. They were also the couple that reached Apollos with the gospel. (See Acts 18:24-28) For a time they traveled with Paul. As mentioned in the text, at one point they risked their own lives to save him. We have no more details of what happened.

They are the New Testament example of a ministry couple. They are always pictured as traveling and doing ministry together. At the point of Paul's writing, they had settled in Rome and started a church in their own home. (See Romans 16:4) They are a biblical example of a marriage ministry team.

As you can guess, I am a strong believer in married couples doing ministry together. For years my wife put on children's ministries as we traveled across the United States conducting church renewals. I would preach to the adults while she took the children and put on a dynamite children's ministry.

As our children aged, they participated in the ministry. They learned ministry by joining us in ministry together as a family. My daughter Bethany was my International ministry partner for years. She started in that role at age 14 and has even joined me as a presenter at pastors conferences in India. Doing ministry is more caught than taught.

The concept of a family ministry team removes some of the issues associated with women in ministry. It looks like Phillip the evangelist believed in family ministry. It appears that his four daughters had a prophecy ministry in the early church under his authority umbrella. (See Acts 21:8-9) Admittedly, the biblical description is very small and sketchy and therefore subject to mere speculation.

The bottom line is that God calls and anoints married couples and even families for fruitful ministry. This model was not missed by the early church, especially in front lines mission work.

#### **Ministry is Made Up Of People: Romans 16:6-16**

"6) Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7) Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8) Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9) Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. 10) Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11) Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. 12) Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13) Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. 14) Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. 15) Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16) Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you."

This is an amazing list of greetings. I am not going to take time to go through the list, but I do want to make a broad observation; "ministry boils down to people and relationships.. Paul had a genuine and kindred relationship with these people.

I have heard it said that "ministry moves at the speed of relationships!" That was certainly true in the life of Jesus. He surrounded himself with people and poured Himself into meaningful and intentional relationships.

This text proves that Paul followed the same example. There are 27 people called by name in this text and many more mentioned. Paul was not wasting time with his writing by greeting these people, he was focusing on the eternal.

Above all else, take time to invest in people. Other things pass away, but people are eternal. Don't fall into the trap of being isolated in life. It might seem easy with less drama, but it is not fruitful.

#### **Warning Against Troublemakers: Romans 16:17-18**

“17) Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18) For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

It is sad, but there are some people who are motivated to cause divisions. They enter into harmonious churches or fellowships and sow discord with the goal of creating turmoil or causing a division. They feed on tension, drama, and division. They will use nearly any issue to stir up conflict and then they rally people to join their side. They are trouble makers. In the absence of conflict, they work to create it!

They have no desire to listen or submit to biblical teaching or truth. The Apostle John pointed to the importance of “walking in the truth” in both 2 & 3 John. But these troublemakers are self-centered and worldly-minded. They willfully ignore the truth.

This is totally contrary to the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-16), and the admonition of Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6. Verse three is very pointed. It says; “(3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.. From the context we discover that godliness is clothed with humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love. The inner work of the Holy Spirit always produces peaceful temperance within the true Christian that spills into healthy relationships.

By contrast, Paul points out in Romans 16:18 that the trouble makers were slaves to their own appetites. They were driven by their flesh and not the Spirit. They had smooth speech but deceptive motives. Granted, some “drama” may surround new Christians, but these trouble makers had a resume of sowing discord.

Paul’s advice was to “keep an eye on them.” The idea was to watch them carefully so as to avert any problems before they take root and spread in the local body of Christ. Deception must be confronted with truth and prayer.

Let me bring a short warning to the troublemaker. Jesus will bring wrath on those who tamper with His Bride and cause division based on their own selfish desires. (2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:14-15) If these shoes fit your feet... Repent quickly and turn to Jesus. in truth, love, and genuine humility.

If your life is filled with tension, drama, and broken relationships, you are void of the Spirit and in need of salvation. God wants to help you win the inner war before He uses you in the life of others or in His church. Jesus changes lives and turns troublemakers into peace-makers.

### **Crushing Satan Under Your Feet: Romans 16:19-20**

“19) For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. 20) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

The Roman believers had a zeal to live for God in truth. They had a reputation of wanting to obey the Word of God. This brought much joy to Paul.

Yet he admonished them to “be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.” The Greek word for “good” means “good, benevolent, profitable and useful.” It is a very positive term. By contrast, evil is “evil, bad, vile, harmful and destructive.” It is a very negative term.

Notice, Paul wanted them to be wise in that which is good and innocent in what is evil. The book of Proverbs was written for the purpose of helping people be wise in good and avoid the traps of evil. I try to read a chapter of Proverbs daily. It is a good practice for every believer.

The word “innocent” is very fascinating. It literally means “without any mixture of deceit, without any foreign material mixed in.” Christians create problems for themselves when they mix worldly values and secular philosophies with their belief system. This is extremely common today. In Colossians 2:8 Paul warned that this is a way for Satan to lead people into captivity. He thrives on blending deception into a Christians belief system.

We now come to verse 20 where Paul promises that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” There are several ways to look at this verse. Some believe Paul was saying that Satan was soon going to be crushed in the world in general. The past 2,000 years of history makes that view very hard to accept. Things were about to get very difficult for the Roman Christians.

So what was he saying? I believe he was talking about the journey to personal freedom that every believer is called to pursue. The preceding verse leads to this conclusion. As they became wise in good and innocent in evil, Satan gradually lost his grip on them.

Obedience to truth and the ways of God was setting them free. (John 8:31-36) The Holy Spirit was using the Word of God to transform them into a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) They were putting off the old self, renewing their minds with truth, and putting on the new self.

(Ephesians 4:17-24. Satan was being defeated in their individual lives. He was being crushed under their feet. The gospel was bearing much fruit in them.

Every Christian is called into this process. It is so rewarding watching new Christians move from minds full of deception to minds full of truth, from bondage to freedom, and from defeats to victories. Notice, it was their obedience to this process that made Paul observe that Satan was being crushed under their feet.

Are you progressing through this journey or are you stuck in a rut? If you are being defeated, it is most likely because you are not innocent of evil. You are mixing deception with truth, evil with good, and worldliness with godliness. You are empowering Satan in your life.

Moses warned Israel that they could not inhabit the promised land without cleansing the evil idols and sinful ways of the former inhabitants. (Deuteronomy 6-9) The same holds true for us.

We cannot enter into our new life “in Christ” without putting off the old life. The way to crush Satan is to starve the flesh and feed the Spirit. Freedom is within reach of every child of God!

#### **Growing at the Speed of Relationships: Romans 16:21-24**

“21) Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. 22) I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23) Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. 24) [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]”

There was a kindred fellowship among the early believers. In Romans 16:1-16, Paul greeted many of the Christians who were in Rome. Keep in mind, Paul wrote this letter from Corinth.

As this letter comes to a close in Romans 16:21-24, a group of Paul's ministry associates send their greetings to the Roman believers. It seems that they had close bonds with each other.

Corinth and Rome were both sea port cities around 450 miles apart by water. Travel between them was probably fairly common by merchant ships, which also sold tickets for passengers.

Anyone from Rome wishing to travel to Palestine most likely stopped over in Corinth. The same held true in the opposite direction. Corinth was strategically located on the trade route from east to west.

The Christians in both churches practiced hospitality. They opened their homes to travelers. This was not only an effective evangelism tool, it also fostered kindred fellowship between these two churches. As can be ascertained from this chapter, there were many good and healthy friendships between believers within these two congregations.

I confess, Romans 16 was previously a boring chapter for me. I would skim over this chapter on my way to more palatable chapters. But this year the Holy Spirit is using this chapter to convict me of the tragically shallow friendships in my life.

It appears that ministry in the early church was built around fostering deep fellowship and relationships. That can be seen at the beginning of the church in Acts 2:41-47, and it holds true in this last chapter of the book of Romans years later. The New Testament as a whole screams the message that “Ministry Moves At The Speed Of Relationships.”

How are you doing at building healthy Christian relationships. This is where biblical application takes place and where many of the dynamics of the Christian life unfold.

Don't fall into the isolation trap. Satan will do everything in his power to divorce you from close fellowship with the body of Christ. He wants to leave you wounded, bitter and stunted in your spiritual growth. Whatever your past bad experiences with people, shake them off and move on! You will grow at the speed of healthy relationships in your life.

#### **Conclusion to the Book of Romans. Romans 16:25-27**

“25) Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 25) but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 26. to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.” We now have the conclusion to the book of Romans. It serves as a brief summary of the entire book. At this point the Bible student needs to go back and read the full book in one setting to wrap their mind around all the moving parts that converge in the gospel.

In the book of Romans, Paul does a brief survey of human history and God raising up the Jewish nation for a noble purpose. The Old Testament is primarily the story of the Jewish people. They seemed to want to know and follow God, but lacked the inner strength or power to do so. They were slaves to sin and their own fleshly desires.

When Moses gave the Law, the children of Israel had a high and righteous moral code that defined the holiness of God, but it failed to change the inner heart of people. Paul penned the book of Romans through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to unpack and explain the full impact of the work of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Jesus not only paid for human sin on the cross, but also opened the door for a new relationship with God based on grace and faith.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of this coming age, but it was a mystery to them. (Read 1 Peter 1:10-12. They longed for it, but could not enter into the glory of the coming church age. It remained a mystery to them.

But that all changed with the coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Romans is a core part of the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret in previous ages. It explains how Jesus Christ accomplished human redemption and the possibility to live by faith and walk in the Spirit.

(Review Romans 5-8) These were radically new concepts that accompanied the gospel.

In Paul's conclusion, he touched on another benefit of the gospel in verse 26. Instead of being for Israel, Jesus opened the door of salvation to “all the nations.” John 3:16 makes it clear that



God loves the whole world and sent His Son to bring salvation to all mankind. People are saved by grace through faith.

Paul also makes it clear in this conclusion that the One and Only Eternal God has only one way of salvation. Not all roads lead to God. Jesus Christ is the only way to God. (See Acts 4:12)

Jesus claimed to be “the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father, but through me.” (John 14:6)

The book of Romans does not point to human religion as the means to salvation. There are hundreds of man-made religions. The book of Romans points to the gospel and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the only way to God.

There is an additional point that can be gleaned from these three concluding verses to the book of Romans. Verse 25 starts out by saying that God can “establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” Only the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change people. Paul looked for this change as an indication of true salvation.

A bit of self examination at this point is important. Has the gospel and your relationship with Jesus Christ changed you? If not, why not. The problem is not with the gospel.